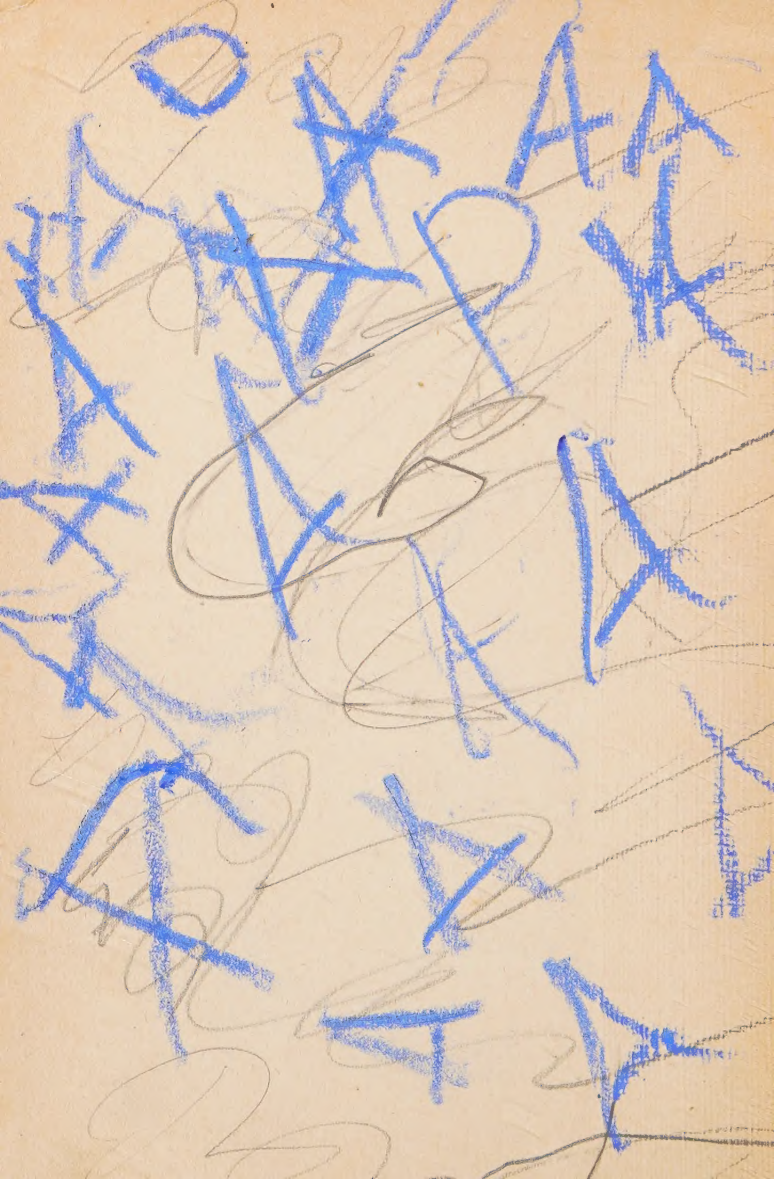
IDYLLS OF THE KING

(SELECTIONS)

TENNYSON



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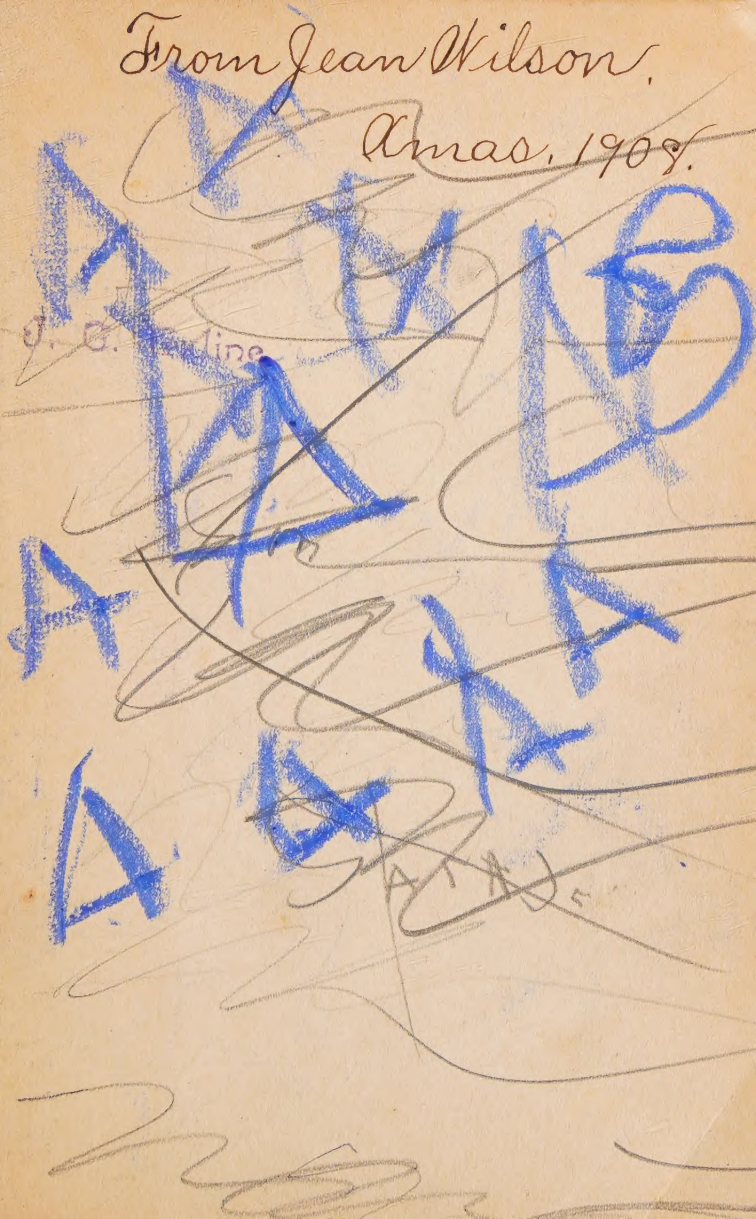

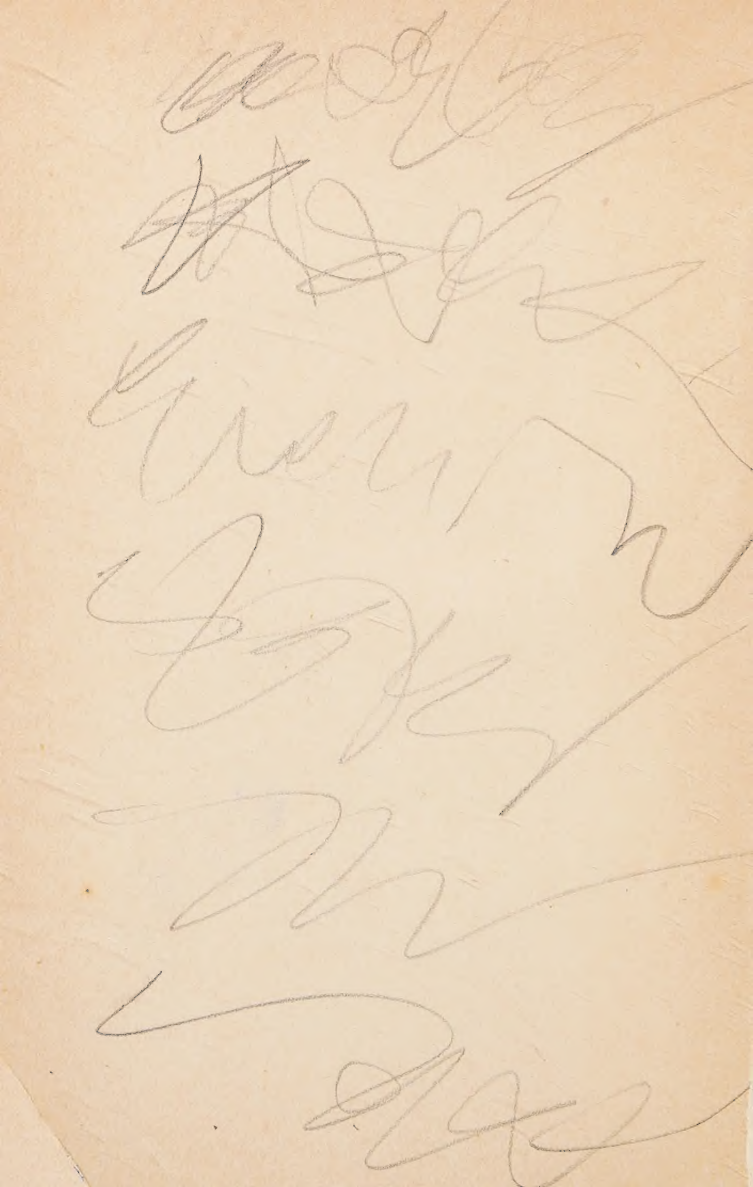

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ALFRED LORD TENNYSON

TENNYSON'S

GARETH AND LYNETTE
LANCELOT AND ELAINE
AND THE PASSING
OF ARTHUR

EDITED
WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES
BY

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PREFACE

The three idylls included in this volume are those selected as a substitute for *The Princess* for the College Entrance Examinations of 1906 and thereafter.

The aim of the editor has been threefold: to edit fully without the appearance of pedantry; to give the pupils such an introduction to the Arthurian romances as seems necessary for a complete understanding of these special idylls; to make the learner a sympathetic reader of Tennyson. The text of the Globe edition of the poet's works has been followed in all respects excepting in the spelling of such words as color, honor, etc. In annotating the *Century Dictionary* has been used for definitions. The editor has made frequent use of Malory's *Morte Darthur* whenever a quotation would make a passage clearer. He is also indebted to Dr. J. Scott Clark's *A Study of English and American Poets* for some short quotations used in the Introduction.

In the matter of interpretation a paper in the *Contemporary Review* for January, 1870, and one in the same review for May, 1873, were found helpful; but the editor is most largely indebted to the present Lord Tennyson, whose *Memoir* of his father is an invaluable aid in a study of the *Idylls*. This *Memoir* was prepared largely under the eye of the poet. It contains a history of almost every poem and interpretations of many. The explanation of the allegory of the *Idylls*, as given in the Introduction to this volume, is quoted by Lord Tennyson as that of his father.

In order to interpret the music and the spirit of a poet it is necessary to understand his art form. Tennyson was a master of blank verse. The editor has therefore given several pages to a discussion of the mechanism of Tennyson's blank verse. In his definitions of the kinds of poetry and in his classification of the poems mentioned he has been to some extent guided by Dr. Gummere's *Handbook of Poetics*. The method of scansion suggested, however, is his own, formed from ideas gathered from many sources after a long experience as a teacher of poetry. Teachers will find that a thorough understanding of some such method will aid the learner in the appreciation of poetry.

W. B.

Erasmus Hall High School,
Brooklyn, Nov. 1, 1903.

summoned to read his prize poem at Commencement. As a member of a society of college men called the "Apostles," however, this shyness left him, and he was always ready to recite ballads of his own composition or even to extemporize verses when called on to entertain. "Alfred Tennyson was our hero, the great hero of our day," said Fanny Kemble, the celebrated actress, who used to visit her brother who also was at Cambridge. In this society of the "Apostles" Tennyson formed lifelong friendships with Milnes (afterward Lord Houghton), Trench (afterward Archbishop), Alford (afterward Dean of Canterbury), Merivale (afterward Dean of Ely), and Hallam, whom he immortalized in *In Memoriam*. In the meetings of this society were discussed all the leading social and political questions of the day. Tennyson preached the onward progress of liberty, while he opposed revolutionary license. In the summer of 1830 there was an insurrection in Spain against the tyranny of the king. Tennyson and Hallam, sympathizing with the insurgents, journeyed to the Pyrenees with money to assist the revolutionists. They succeeded in delivering the money and in escaping the watchfulness of the Spanish authorities. Thus he was willing to act as well as to preach. In this year also appeared his volume of *Poems chiefly Lyrical*. The next year he left Cambridge to begin his life work as poet.

Tennyson at Cambridge, February, 1828, to February, 1831.

One month after Tennyson's departure from the University his father died, and the care of a large family fell on the young poet, though there was an income sufficiently great to enable them all to live comfortably. For nearly twenty years he studied his art; at times severely criticised, at others receiving his due reward of praise. He was struggling to become

Tennyson in manhood.

the master poet, and full recognition came in the end. The year 1850 is memorable for three events in the poet's life, — the publication of *In Memoriam*, his marriage, and the laureateship.

At Cambridge Tennyson met Arthur Henry Hallam, and the two became warm friends. Though they were competitors in the race for the Chancellor's prize, this made no difference in their friendship. After Tennyson left the University, Hallam became a frequent visitor at the Tennyson home, and there he met Alfred's sister, Emilia, to whom he became betrothed. Hallam was the most sympathetic critic of Tennyson's poems, and verses seldom passed to the public until they had received the friend's sanction. They twice visited the continent together, and they were equally concerned in the social and political conditions of the time, meditating and debating great plans of reform. Suddenly the friendship was severed; Hallam died at Vienna on September 15, 1833. He was there with his father. "When Mr. Hallam returned from his daily walk, he saw Arthur asleep as he supposed upon the couch; a blood vessel near the brain had suddenly burst; it was not sleep but death." A letter from Arthur's uncle announced the sad news to Alfred, and the course of the poet's life was changed. In the next two years he produced a small volume of poems, and in 1847 *The Princess* appeared; but the poet was brooding over the death of his friend and over all that death means. In 1850 his great memorial poem, *In Memoriam*, was printed. Stopford Brooke calls it "the most complete, most rounded to a polished sphere, of the longer poems of Tennyson." This poem not only fixed his rank as a poet, but gave him ready money and income sufficient to enable him to consider the subject of marriage.

"In Memoriam."

Tennyson's brother Charles was married in 1836. Alfred walked into the church with the bride's younger sister, Emily Sarah Sellwood, a slender, beautiful girl of seventeen. They had met six years before, but this second meeting convinced Tennyson that his feeling toward her was more than that of friendship. Very soon an engagement existed between them, but marriage was deferred because of lack of funds. Tennyson's income was small. He and his family lost heavily in an investment. So far away did marriage seem that the poet generously gave the woman he loved her freedom. Even with his longings for a better income, when, in 1845, Sir Robert Peel secured for him an annual pension of £200, he accepted it on his own conditions, writing: "I have done nothing slavish to get it. I never even solicited for it by myself or thro' others. It was all done for me without a word or hint from me, and Peel tells me I need not by it be fettered in the public expression of any opinion I choose to take up." When, however, *In Memoriam* was printed, the poet found himself with a bank account of £300 and the promise of a regular income from his poems sufficient to warrant his marriage. On June 13, 1850, Alfred Tennyson and Emily Sellwood became husband and wife. "The peace of God came into my life before the altar when I wedded her," he said in after life; and on another occasion to some of his most intimate friends he remarked: "I have known many women who were excellent, one in one way, another in another way, but this woman is the noblest woman I have ever known." The wedding was followed very closely by the laureateship.

Tennyson's marriage.

Wordsworth had been poet laureate, but he died in 1850. In November the appointment came to Tennyson, owing, it is asserted, "chiefly to Prince Albert's admiration for

In Memoriam." Upon receiving the letter announcing that he was the choice of the queen for the vacant laureateship he wrote two letters, one declining and one accepting, determining to rely on the advice of friends in the matter of mailing the letters. "I have no passion for courts, but a great love of privacy," he wrote to one. He was advised by them not to decline it This office added about £100 to his annual income. From this time he continued in easy circumstances, with an ever-increasing revenue.

The poet laureate.

In 1853 the annual income from Tennyson's books was £500. Two years later he purchased the Farringford house on the Isle of Wight. This became his permanent home, though in 1868 he built a summer house at Aldworth in Surrey. Many honors now came to him. In 1855 the University of Oxford conferred on him the degree of D.C.L. In a few years he had the honor to decline the lord rectorship of Glasgow University. He had not only kept the friends of his early life, but made new friendships. Prince Albert and Gladstone visited him at Farringford. The Duke of Argyll became a firm friend, and the living authors such as Browning, Carlyle, Ruskin, Thackeray, Fitzgerald, Huxley, Bagehot, and Harrison boasted and valued his companionship. In 1873 Tennyson received a letter from Mr. Gladstone offering a baronetcy from the queen. In answer he wrote, "I had rather we should remain plain Mr. and Mrs. and that, if it were possible, the title should first be assumed by our son." This did not seem wise and so passed by. Again the next year the offer was renewed through Mr. Disraeli, who was then premier. Tennyson still insisted on asking that the honor be reserved for his son, but as this was contrary to all precedent, the baronetcy passed by him again.

Tennyson's prosperity.

Nine years later, through Mr. Gladstone the queen made an offer of a peerage. This time the poet was approached with much diplomacy, Mr. Gladstone first suggesting the idea to Tennyson's son. It was while the Tennysons and Gladstones were on a voyage. The son watched his opportunity and opened the subject. Then Mr. Gladstone came and urged the matter on the poet. Tennyson took two or three days to consider the offer; then he said to his son, "By Gladstone's advice I have consented to take the peerage, but for my own part I shall regret my simple name all my life." About this matter Mr. Gladstone wrote the poet's son, "I think that by it we certainly succeeded in decorating the House of Lords, and I think your father will also be pleased with having given, as I believe, some real pleasure to the Queen in the grant of this honor." When Tennyson took his seat in the House of Lords he refused to sit with either party. "He felt that he must be free to vote for that which seemed to him best for the empire." The first bill for which he voted was the Extension of the Franchise. This he held to be a "matter of justice," and he always acted on that principle.

Tennyson was in his seventy-fifth year when he attained to the peerage; still he was a very active man. His political utterances were not in the form of speeches to the lords, but in the form of stirring lyrics, — his first as a peer being his poem *Freedom*, published in *Macmillan's Magazine* for December, 1884. About this time, when the Franchise Bill was under discussion, he wrote to Gladstone, who was premier:

Tennyson's last years and his death, October 6, 1892.

> Steersman, be not precipitate in thine act
> Of steering, for the river here, my friend,
> Parts in two channels, moving to one end —
> This goes straight forward to the cataract:

That streams about the bend;
But tho' the cataract seem the nearer way,
Whate'er the crowd on either bank may say,
Take thou the "bend," 't will save thee many a day.

Tennyson enjoyed the peerage for eight years, working, planning, writing. In his eighty-first year he wrote *Crossing the Bar*. One October day while passing from Aldworth to Farringford he heard the "moaning of the bar," and the poem was written. His wish that it be placed at the end of all editions of his poems has been observed. When he died, a life that had been all music passed away in song; singing, he "crost the bar."

THE POETRY OF TENNYSON

De Quincey mentions two elements of literary style, — matter and manner. Buffon's well-known definition, "Style is of the man himself," adds a third, and a very important one, — the personality or individuality of the writer. These three elements may easily be found in the style of Tennyson.

Tennyson's style.

As to his matter, Stopford Brooke says that "he wrote of the everyday loves and duties of men and women; of the aspirations and trials which are common to all ages and classes." Tennyson's son, Hallam, relates how the poet was accustomed to meet Carlyle, Thackeray, Dickens, Huxley, and other thoughtful men of all professions and of all degrees of attainment. Their talk would touch largely on politics, philosophy, and especially on the new speculations rife on every side. Upon projects of reform or of the great movements of philanthropy he reflected much. This reflection furnished the

(a) His matter.

matter for his poetry; this matter he molded into art form. *The Princess* offered a poet's solution of the woman question as it stood nearly sixty years ago. *Locksley Hall* represented "young life, its good side, its deficiencies, and its yearnings." Tennyson called *In Memoriam* "The Way of the Soul," and *Maud* a "Drama of the Soul" set in a landscape glorified by love. But the matter of Tennyson's poetry is spiritualized by the personality of the man.

(b) His personality.

There must have been something great in Tennyson the man. The queen received him cordially from time to time. The Prince Consort, the princesses, Gladstone, Huxley, and the Duke of Argyll were visitors at Farringford. A few of the elements of the poet's individuality have been noted by his critics. The great French writer, Taine, says, "Without being a pedant, he is moral. . . . He speaks of God and the soul nobly, tenderly, without ecclesiastical prejudice." Canon Farrar says, "Tennyson, though he had his moods of sorrow and perplexity, was an optimist, who had achieved his right to optimism by the fighting down of despair and doubt." Professor Dowden says Mr. Tennyson "has a strong dignity and efficiency of law, and law understood in its widest meaning. Energy nobly controlled, and ordered activity, delight his imagination. Violence, extravagance, immoderate force, the swerving from appointed ends, revolt, — these are with Mr. Tennyson the supreme manifestations of evil." And Dr. Van Dyke adds, "His music must thrill us with the conviction that the humblest child of man has a duty, an ideal, a destiny." Throughout his life he allied himself against the cry of "Art for art's sake"; he was "a poet with a message."

From his earliest attempts Tennyson endeavored to cultivate the highest art of poetic expression. He was accustomed to modify the old adage so that it read, *Poeta nascitur et fit*

(the poet is both born and made). Some of his poems were subjected to many changes and several complete revisions.

(c) His manner.

It seemed to be the poet's aim to paint his scenes vividly, to express his thoughts clearly and precisely, to adorn his pages with jewels of thought and figures of beauty, and to give the whole the color of rich romance. There are critics of note, however, who have charged Tennyson with an over-ornateness. Taine says, "He gave them [his poems] too much adornment and polishing; he seemed like an Epicurean in style as well as in beauty." On the other hand, Bagehot asserts that "Tennyson has painted with pure art." Although his style is beset with mannerisms offensive to some, although he reveled in alliteration and delighted in compound words three or four deep, such as "one-day-seen" and "nine-years-fought-for," Tennyson became so skilled in the use of ornamentation that criticism was silenced. The poet proved himself superior to his critics in artistic judgment and in taste. His own dictum about literary work was, "An artist should get his workmanship as good as he can, and make his work as perfect as possible. A small vessel built on fine lines is likely to float further down the stream of time than a big raft." So he strove to make every verse he composed as artistically correct as he was able to make it.

The Greeks recognized three kinds of poetry, — lyric, epic, and dramatic. Tennyson tried all three. In his early life the lyric element predominated; next "the melody of the lyric is wedded to the sentiment and picture of the idyll." The idyll merges into the epic. There are, too, the mock heroic, *The Princess*, and the monodrama, *Maud*, with their beautiful inter-lyrics; and these lead to the drama. First, then, as a lyric poet.

Three kinds of poetry.

Lyric poetry is the artistic expression of the sentiments and emotions, that is, it is subjective. The poet "lets his illumined being o'errun" in music and song. The action of the lyric is usually rapid; the time quick; the verse itself musical. The poet is free to invent forms. Many of Tennyson's lyric measures are wholly his own; while others have been so treated by him as to make them virtually new. Among those which the poet himself admired were that of *The Daisy*, some of the anapestic movements in *Maud*, and the "long-rolling rhythm of his ode *To Virgil*." Alfred Tennyson's contribution to the volume of verse entitled *Poems of Two Brothers* was largely lyric. At Cambridge, in certain college rooms, he would often declaim his own poems and even "improvise verses by the score, full of lyrical passion." In his first volume, *Poems chiefly Lyrical*, "the variety of his lyrical measures" was noted. In the volume of 1842 appeared *St. Agnes' Eve* and *Sir Galahad*, which Stedman pronounces the "purest and highest of all his lyrical pieces." *The Talking Oak* of this same volume is called the "nonpareil of sustained lyrics in quatrain verse." Throughout his long lifetime the lyric fires continued to burn intensely; for nearly every year gave the world new songs and ballads. What he furnished is usually described in the superlative degree. Landor called his *Hands all Round* "incomparably the best (convivial) lyric in the language." The spirit of English freedom and patriotism breathes through such songs as *Love thou thy land*, *Of old sat Freedom on the heights*, *England and America in 1782*, and *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. The *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* is the most ambitious of the patriotic lyrics. Stedman says, "Few will deny that, taken together, the five melodies, — *As through the land*, *Sweet and low*, *The splendor falls on castle walls*, *Home they*

Tennyson as a lyric poet.

brought her warrior dead, and *Ask me no more!* — that these constitute the finest group of songs produced in our century"; and he adds, "the *Bugle Song* seems to many the most perfect English lyric since the time of Shakespeare." The great elegy, *In Memoriam*, is a chain of lyrics, and *Maud* is more lyric than dramatic. *Crossing the Bar*, written in his eighty-first year, shows the lyric power still unimpaired. In all this work he was cheered and encouraged by Lady Tennyson, who furnished the musical setting for several of his songs and the inspiration for some of his idylls. The idyll, indeed, was the stepping-stone from the lyric to the epic.

The word "idyll" means "a little picture." Quiet and homely scenes are fitting subjects for this kind of poetry; for "the idyll must be simple, calm, more concerned with situation than with action." Tennyson's short narrative poems giving pictures of simple country life are idylls, and he wrote many of this kind. *The Gardener's Daughter*, *The Miller's Daughter*, and *Godiva* are purely idyllic pieces. In Tennyson's poetry there is no dividing line between the lyric and the idyll and the idyll and the epic. *The Brook* is an idyll containing an inter-lyric; *The Princess* is a mock heroic poem containing several lyrics and one idyll.

The idyll.

Epic poetry, Dr. Gummere says, is that kind in which the poet himself narrates a story as if he were present. It is simple in construction, yet it admits of the episode and the dialogue. The meter of the lyric may vary with the impulses of thought; that of the epic must be uniform. The lyric deals with the present; the grand epic with the past. The epic enforces no moral although it may hold one in solution. Some of Tennyson's idylls are epics. Such ballads as *The Revenge*, *The Defence of Lucknow*, and *The Voyage of Maeldune* are good

Tennyson's epics.

examples of the ballad-epic. *Enoch Arden* and *Dora* represent another kind of epic, — the simple, touching tale. Tennyson's nearest approach to a grand epic was his *Idylls of the King*. A friend of the poet called this work "Epylls of the King." "According to him they were little epics (not idylls) woven into an epical unity." Still the *Idylls of the King* are idyllic; they "are full of little pictures which show that Tennyson has studied nature at first-hand, and that he understood how to catch and reproduce the most fleeting and delicate expressions of her face." This poem was the growth of nearly half a century. It was late in life when Tennyson turned to the drama as the medium of art expression.

The "Idylls of the King."

"The drama is imitated human action." Dramatic poetry partakes of the nature of both the epic and the lyric; it deals with the past, but represents past actions as actually occurring before our eyes. The basis, then, is epic, but there are the lyric sentiment, action, and fire. Characters live and act before us and speak in our presence. Thus the poetry is heightened by the varying situations. Tennyson was sixty-five years of age when his first play was published. *Queen Mary*, *Harold*, and *Becket* form what he called his "historical trilogy." The poet's idea was to portray the making of England: Harold reproduces the great conflict between Danes, Saxons, and Normans; *Becket* deals with the struggle between the Crown and the Church; *Queen Mary* represents the rise of the individual into freedom. Other dramas are *The Foresters*, *The Cup*, and *The Falcon*. The value of his dramatic work as compared with his other poetry has been questioned.

Dramatic poetry.

Tennyson's dramas.

In *Maud*, *Locksley Hall*, and other pieces, Tennyson used the monodrama, — a form very popular with Browning. When

he undertook the drama proper he was prepared for adverse criticism. There have, however, been given two estimates of his dramatic work, as there are two kinds of modern drama, — the drama of action and the drama of living. In the one the characters move before our eyes and in an artificial way act their little parts; in the other the characters live before our eyes. The contrast is felt when Shakespeare's Othello is compared with Browning's Luria. Othello talks and acts; Luria says little, acts little, but *lives* the hero. Of course on the stage the drama of action is the more popular. Tennyson's were rather dramas of living. One critic, therefore, says that he is not a true dramatic poet because he has the limitations of his day and generation; he is romantic and not dramatic. Another says: "Tennyson is one of the great voices of modern times. He is thoroughly penetrated with the spirit of the era, and his methods are throughout such as that spirit dictates. His plays are not so much the delineation of great deeds as they are the studies of the motives which lie behind those deeds. . . . Green, the historian of England, says, 'All my researches into the annals of the twelfth century have not given me so vivid a conception of the character of Henry II. as was embodied in Tennyson's *Becket*.'" Dr. Van Dyke has expressed the opinion that "it is not too daring to predict that the day is coming when the study of Shakespeare's historical plays will be reckoned no more important to an understanding of English history than the study of Tennyson's trilogy!"

Tennyson as a dramatist.

THE "IDYLLS OF THE KING"

Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* has been called the "Epic of Arthur." The Grand Epic may deal with the mythology or the religion of a people, or it may relate the legends that gather about the history of the past. Milton chose for his great epic the theme of "man's first disobedience" and the bringing of "Death into the world," a subject that deeply concerned every human being and enabled him to write a Grand Epic; for a work of great art must have a great subject. Tennyson, combining the legendary with the mythical, embodied in his poem a Christian ideal that makes it also a Grand Epic. The Epic of Arthur is a double allegory; first, as "shadowing Sense at war with Soul"; next, as a poem of "The Year and the Soul."

The "Epic of Arthur."

As the Epic of Arthur the poem is legendary. Arthur was a king of Britain who flourished in that dark and stormy period when, the protecting arm of Rome having been withdrawn, the weakened people were left subject to the inroads of the invading Saxon. In this struggle of Christian against pagan, King Arthur, by uniting the native kings and barons in a confederacy, was able to stand successfully against the incoming Northmen and even to drive them back. Such was his fame that succeeding generations came to hold him in great veneration. As time passed, legends gathered around the name of the great Arthur. For two or three centuries these grew by oral repetition, until, after the eighth century, a monk named Nennius put in Latin a written account of the wars of Arthur, naming the twelve great battles which this king fought and won. In written form this account passed from hand to hand, the stories growing in number and in interest. In one

form or another the legends of Arthur found their way across the English Channel. The trouvères of northern France chanted the old ones and created new. The stories became popular at the court of the Plantagenet kings, eventually forming what has been called the "Arthurian Cycle of Romance." Then through many hands they passed into Anglo-Saxon and into modern English.

The "Arthurian Cycle of Romance."

The edition of the Arthurian legends which most influenced Tennyson was that of Sir Thomas Malory, a knight of the fifteenth century, whose *Morte Darthur* was published in 1485. He seems to have added the story of Gareth and Lynette. Though he added little else, "he selected the most interesting things with an almost invariable sureness, though there are one or two omissions; and he omitted the less interesting parts with a sureness to which there are hardly any exceptions at all. He grasped, and this is his great and saving merit as an author, the one central fact of the story — that in the combination of the Quest of the Grail with the loves of Lancelot and Guinevere, lay the kernel at once and the conclusion of the whole matter." Tennyson, however, has made the old legends his own, "restored the idealism, and infused into them a spirit of modern thought and an ethical significance, setting his characters in a rich and varied landscape; as indeed otherwise their archaic stories would not have appealed to the modern world at large." In 1848 the poet, brooding over the Arthurian romances, made a tour of Cornwall, and eight years later, accompanied by his wife, he visited Wales, where he wandered over the mountains and viewed the scenes so wonderfully reproduced in his verse pictures.

Malory's "Morte Darthur."

Preparation for writing the "Idylls."

With Tennyson himself the *Idylls* were a growth of nearly half a century. A great poem comes from brooding, and through all these years the brooding process continued. As early as 1832 the poet began to draw on the Arthurian legends for his inspiration to song. First there appeared the lyric, *The Lady of Shalott*, which is only another version of *Lancelot and Elaine*. The 1842 volume contained *Sir Galahad*, *Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere*, and *Morte d'Arthur* (which forms a part of his present *The Passing of Arthur*). The poet was just experimenting; it was not till 1859 that he published the first installment, *Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, *Guinevere*. Then followed a rest of ten years, after which (1869) a volume appeared containing *The Coming of Arthur*, *The Holy Grail*, *Pelleas and Ettarre*, and *The Passing of Arthur*. In 1871 *The Last Tournament* was privately printed and then published in the *Contemporary Review;* republished with *Gareth and Lynette* in 1872. These with *Balin and Balan* (published in 1885) make up the twelve books.

The growth of the "Idylls."

The complete epic as finally arranged consists of a *Dedication to Prince Albert*, an Epilogue *To the Queen*, and the *Idylls* in three parts, — *The Coming of Arthur*, *The Round Table*, and *The Passing of Arthur*. *The Round Table* consists of ten idylls, the names of which have already been mentioned.

The plot.

The main action of the plot is the criminal love of Lancelot and Guinevere working to overthrow the unsuspecting goodness of King Arthur. While each of the idylls of *The Round Table* has an interest of its own, every one bears upon this main action, and by suggestion, by assertion, and by foreshadowing helps to work the solution of the problem of virtue. Though virtue seems to fail, the poet has given his own interpretation to his theme in the words:

> "The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
> And God fulfils himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world. . . ."

As for the meaning of the poem, Lord Tennyson would affirm, "Poetry is like shot-silk with many glancing colors. Every reader must find his own interpretation according to his ability, and according to his sympathy with the poet."

A double allegory.

Readers who have most sympathy with the poet have found in the *Idylls of the King* a double allegory; it is an epic of "The Year," and also a poem of "Sense at war with Soul."

The epic of "The Year."

As we read the poem, "we go from the marriage of spring in *The Coming of Arthur*, when the blossom of the May seems to spread its perfume over the whole scene, to the early summer of the honeysuckle in *Gareth*, the quickly following mowing-season of *Geraint*, and the sudden summer-thunder-shower of *Vivien* — thence to the full summer of *Elaine*, with oriel casements standing wide for heat — and later, to the sweep of equinoctial storms and broken weather of *The Holy Grail*. Then come the autumn roses and branches of *Pelleas*, and in *The Last Tournament* the close autumn-tide, with all its slowly mellowing avenues, through which we see Sir Tristram riding to his doom. In *Guinevere* the creeping mists of coming winter pervade the picture, and in *The Passing of Arthur* we come to deep winter on the frozen hills: — and the end of all, on the year's shortest day (taken as the end of the year) — that day when the great light of heaven burned at his lowest in the rolling year. The King, who first appears on the night of the New Year, disappears into the dawning light of the new sun bringing the New Year, and thus the whole action of the poem is comprised precisely within the

limits of the one principal and ever-recurring cycle of time." In *Gareth* the joy of life "lives in the eternal youth of goodness. But in the later idylls the allowed sin not only poisons the spring of life in the summer, but spreads its poison through the whole community."

"If epic unity is looked for in the *Idylls*, we find it not in the wrath of an Achilles, nor in the wanderings of Ulysses, but in the unending war of humanity in all ages, — the world-wide war of Sense and Soul, typified in individuals, with the subtle interaction of character upon character, the central dominant figure being the pure, generous, tender, brave, human-hearted Arthur. . . . The great resolve [to ennoble and spiritualize mankind] is kept so long as all work in obedience to the highest and holiest law within them." A single sin intrudes and is allowed to remain; but "in some natures, even among those who would rather die than doubt, it breeds suspicion and want of trust in God and man. Some royal souls are wrought to madness against the world. Others, and some among the highest intellects, become the slaves of the evil which is at first half-disdained. Tender natures sink under the blight; that which is of the highest is then working their death. And in some, as faith declines, religion turns from practical goodness to superstition.

The epic of "Sense at war with Soul."

"This madness has come on us for our sin.

"These seek relief in selfish spiritual excitement, not remembering that man's duty is to forget self in the service of others, and to let visions come and go, and that so only will they see the Holy Grail. In the idyll of *Pelleas and Ettarre* selfishness has turned to open crime; it is the breaking of the storm; nevertheless Pelleas still honors his sacred

vow to the king and spares the wrong-doers. Whereas in *The Last Tournament* the wrong-doer suffers his doom, and is cloven through the brain. We have here the deadly proof of the kinship of all willful sin in murder following adultery in closest relation of cause and consequence, — the prelude of the final act of the tragedy which culminates in the temporary triumph of evil, the confusion of moral order, closing in the great Battle of the West."

"The whole poem is the dream of man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin. Birth is a mystery and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the table-land of life, and its struggles and performances. It is not the history of one man or one generation but of a whole cycle of generations."

Gareth and Lynette represents spring and the springtime of life. The young man in strength and hope and ambition seeks knighthood. After attaining this, he is granted his first quest when nature is as full of life as the sharp-tongued Lynette. The interpretation of the incident of the "blooming boy" is twofold: Gareth found "Love instead of Death"; and "who knows whether indeed Life be Death and Death Life?" The allegorical interpretation is, "Death, though apparently the most formidable antagonist of all, turns out to be no real foe, and his fall ushers in the happier day from underground."

"Gareth and Lynette."

Lancelot and Elaine is seventh in the order of final arrangement of the *Idylls*. The poison of the one sin at Arthur's court has spread and we see "the piteous early death of innocence and hope resulting from it." Littledale says: "This is perhaps the most *idyllic* of the *Idylls* and it is in most respects the most touching, as a picture of Elaine's love, 'that never found its mortal close,' and Lancelot's great

and guilty passion 'that marred his face and marked it ere his time.' Tennyson's power of drawing the characters of simple and lovable women is here seen to perfection. It is a harder task to depict women like Enid and Elaine, fair and lovable beings with all the charm of purity and goodness, but moving steadfastly within the orbit of simple duties, and lacking the effect of deviation, the contrast of light and shade, that we see in the lives of less clear-natured women. In delineating these gracious creatures, Tennyson stands unrivaled; and in his rare sympathy with such types of womanly purity, we may perceive the almost feminine delicacy of his mind."

"Lancelot and Elaine."

The Passing of Arthur is the concluding idyll of the poem, yet it was the first one of the series to be written. In the volume of 1842 the largest part of the poem appeared under the title of *Morte d'Arthur*. It is a fitting end to the poem in every way. Arthur received Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake and he returns it to her. Then the barge appears to carry him to the blest Avilion. "The symbolism in this portion of the idyll is less prominent, and the story is told in Homeric simplicity and directness. . . . Arthur's earthly realm may reel back into the beast," and his round table may be dissolved; but his purity is untarnished, his honor is without stain, and the ideal which he has striven to realize has lost none of its inward vitality and significance. As he passes from earth to "vanish into light," he already gives a forecast of his return as the representative of the new chivalry, when he shall come

"The Passing of Arthur."

With all good things, and war shall be no more.

TENNYSON'S BLANK VERSE

Tennyson "is the creator of a new blank verse, different both from the Elizabethan and from the Miltonic. He has known how to modulate it to every theme, and to elicit a music appropriate to each; attuning it in turn to a tender and lovely grace, as in *The Gardener's Daughter;* to the severe and ideal majesty of the antique, as in *Tithonus;* to meditative thought, as in *The Ancient Sage*, or *Akbar's Dream;* to pathetic or tragic tales of contemporary life, as in *Aylmer's Field*, or *Enoch Arden;* or to sustained romantic narration, as in the *Idylls*. No [other] English poet has used blank verse with such flexible variety, or drawn from it so large a compass of tones; nor has any maintained it so equally on a high level of excellence."

His blank verse.

The artistic and musical blank verse of the *Idylls of the King* is not crystallized into arbitrary forms. The poet takes all the liberties of the musician. Time is the basal element in his verse structure. The movement is quickened or retarded according to the thought. "Don't write so rhythmically," his father said to the boy poet; "break your lines occasionally for the sake of variety." Tennyson, following this suggestion, declared that he was nearer thirty than twenty before he was anything of an artist. While he rigidly conforms to the pentameter line, he gains variety and many delicate shades of effect by using almost every possible mixture of feet. The feet not iambic are called *substituted feet.* He himself tells us how blank verse ought to be made: "The English public think that blank verse is the easiest thing in the world to write, mere prose cut up into five-foot lines; whereas it is one of the most difficult. In a blank verse you can have

from three up to eight beats [or accents]; but, if you vary the beats unusually, your ordinary newspaper critic sets up a howl. The varying of the beats, of the construction of the feet, of the emphasis, of the extra-metrical syllables, and of the pauses, helps to make the greatness of blank verse."

In order to discuss this verse with intelligence and appreciation, it is necessary to agree on a vocabulary; such a vocabulary is here suggested. *Meter* is measure. *Verse* is measured language. *A verse* is a single line of measured language. Language is measured by the foot. A *foot* is a combination of two or three syllables, usually containing one accent or more. There are eight kinds of feet found in Tennyson's blank verse: the *iamb*, a foot of two syllables, the second of which is accented, indicated in writing thus (∪ /); the *trochee*, a foot of two syllables, the first of which is accented, indicated (/ ∪); the *spondee*, two syllables, both accented (/ /); the *pyrrhic*, two syllables, neither accented (∪ ∪); the *anapest*, three syllables, the last of which is accented (∪ ∪ /); the *dactyl*, three syllables, first accented (/ ∪ ∪); the *amphibrach*, three syllables, second accented (∪ / ∪); and the *amphimacer*, three syllables, first and last accented (/ ∪ /). Saintsbury speaks even of the *tribrachs* of Tennyson's idylls. Language to be measured must be rhythmic. Perfect *rhythm* is produced by a regular succession of the same foot or of feet that require equal intervals of time for utterance. The greater swells of a rhythmic movement are produced by a regular succession of verses of equal measure or of verses that require equal intervals of time for utterance. Perfect *blank verse* consists of lines, or verses, which contain five iambic feet and which do not rhyme. (Loosely speaking, rhyme is similarity of sound occurring usually at the end of successive or alternating

Vocabulary for the study of Tennyson's blank verse.

verses.) Such verse containing five iambic feet is described as *iambic pentameter*. *Scansion* consists of reading verse so as to reproduce its rhythm by indicating the natural beats of the feet, the varying flow of the movement, and the changing pulsations of the thought. In scanning blank verse *do not try to make all the feet iambic; read for the thought and the effect, and allow the accents to fall where they must.* Describe every verse as iambic pentameter, pointing out and naming the substituted feet.

The prevailing verse in the *Idylls of the King* is iambic pentameter, such as the following:

And friend | slew friend | not know|ing whom | he slew;
And some | had vi|sions out | of gold|en youth,

The Passing of Arthur, ll. 101, 102.

While a surpassing number of verses contain five beats there is almost every possible arrangement of accented and unaccented syllables with reference to one another. Here and hereafter rhythmic stress and not syllabic accent is meant by the word "accent." In scanning, the syllables of polysyllabic words bearing either primary or secondary word or syllabic accents may have also rhythmic stress. Do not mispronounce words in order to make the rhythm regularly iambic.

Every new arrangement of rhythmic accents produces a new effect. Note the following variations in the kinds of feet used in verse of five rhythmic beats:

Prisoned, | and kept | and coax'd | and whis|tled to —

Gareth and Lynette, l. 14.

This may be described as an iambic pentameter verse with a trochee substituted for the first iamb.

He ne|er spake | word of | reproach | to me,

Lancelot and Elaine, l. 124.

In this verse the third and fourth feet form a choriambus (a trochee followed by an iamb), and in the following verse a hesitating effect is produced by a double choriambus.

First as | in fear, || step af|ter step || she stole

Lancelot and Elaine, l. 340.

Till the | High God | behold | it from | beyond,

The Passing of Arthur, l. 16.

Described as an iambic pentameter verse with a trochee substituted for the first, a spondee for the second, and a pyrrhic for the fourth iambs.

Meeker | than an|y child | to a | rough nurse,

Lancelot and Elaine, l. 852.

Note the jarring effect produced by the pyrrhic followed by the spondee.

All night | in a | waste land | where no | one comes,

The Passing of Arthur, l. 370.

And there, | that day | when the | great light | of heaven

The Passing of Arthur, l. 90.

Southward | they set | their fa|ces. The | birds made

Gareth and Lynette, l. 179.

Rapidly and lightly gliding effects are produced by the introduction of extra syllables. The five-accent lines may have eleven or twelve syllables like the following.

In ev|er high|ering ea|gle cir|cles up

Gareth and Lynette, l. 21.

And Ga|reth went | and hov|ering round | her chair
Gareth and Lynette, l. 33

That smells | a foul-|flesh'd ag|aric | in the holt,
Gareth and Lynette, l. 729.

For this | an eagle, | a roy|al ea|gle, laid
Gareth and Lynette, l. 44.

Anon, | the whole | fair city | had dis|appear'd.
Gareth and Lynette, l. 193.

Then I | so shook | him in | the saddle, | he said,
Gareth and Lynette, l. 29.

'An I | could climb | and lay | my hand | upon it,
Gareth and Lynette, l. 50.

Here the last foot is an amphibrach, and in the next verse the last foot is an amphimacer, a foot rarely found at the end of a line.

At times | the sum|mit of | the high | city flash'd;
Gareth and Lynette, l. 189.

Milder | than an|y mother | to a | sick child,
Lancelot and Elaine, l. 853.

This verse is described as an iambic pentameter verse with a trochee substituted for the first, an amphibrach for the third, a pyrrhic for the fourth, and a spondee for the fifth iambs.

To weary | her ears | with one | contin|uous prayer,
Gareth and Lynette, l. 19.

This and the following two verses have five accents and twelve syllables.

Immingled | with Heav|en's a|zure wav|eringly,
Gareth and Lynette, l. 914.

Melody | on branch | and melo|dy in | mid air.
Gareth and Lynette, l. 180.

This verse, with its dactyl and iamb and amphibrach and spondee, reproduces the melody of the lark or of the thrush.

Verses of three beats are of rare occurrence, but those of four accents are found with greater frequency. Rapidity of movement is gained by lessening the number of accented syllables; and often the movement is lightened by the introduction of extra syllables, eleven and twelve not being uncommon.

And the | long glo|ry of | the win|ter moon.
The Passing of Arthur, l. 360.

Burn'd at | his low|est in | the roll|ing year,
The Passing of Arthur, l. 91.

Look in | upon | the battle; | and in | the mist
The Passing of Arthur, l. 104.

And let | the story | of her dol|orous | voyage
Lancelot and Elaine, l. 1332.

In verses of six and seven accents, the added beats produce emphasis or the effect of harshness, impressiveness, stateliness, solemnity, or kindred tones. With the normal number of syllables, the effect is very marked.

Shrill, chill, | with flakes | of foam. | He, step|ping down
The Passing of Arthur, l. 217.

Down the | long tow|er stairs | hesi|tating:

Lancelot and Elaine, l. 341.

Note the hesitating of this verse and the slow tread of the following.

And so | strode back | slow to | the wound|ed King.

The Passing of Arthur, l. 280.

Like this | last, dim, | weird bat|tle of | the west.

The Passing of Arthur, l. 94.

Note the solemn weirdness produced in this verse by the five successive accents and the emphasis produced in the following verses by the distribution of the accents.

He is | all fault | who hath | no fault | at all:

Lancelot and Elaine, l. 132.

Good moth|er is | bad moth|er un|to me!

Gareth and Lynette, l. 16.

Needs must | be less|er like|lihood, | noble lord,

Lancelot and Elaine, l. 365.

A dead | hush fell; | but when | the dol|orous day

The Passing of Arthur, l. 122.

And with mine | own hand | give his | diamond | to him,

Lancelot and Elaine, l. 755.

For I, | being | simple, | thought to work | His will.

The Passing of Arthur, l. 22.

'Thou hast half | prevail'd | against | me,' said | so—he—

Gareth and Lynette, l. 30.

Muttering | and mur|muring at | his ear, | "Quick, quick!

The Passing of Arthur, l. 347.

The following verses, which contain seven accents, are still more weighty or imposing.

"Hearest | thou this | great voice | that shakes | the world,
The Passing of Arthur, l. 139.

Ran to her, | and lo! | the blood-red light | of dawn
Lancelot and Elaine, l. 1018.

Stay, my | best son! | ye are yet | more boy | than man."
Gareth and Lynette, l. 97.

Were it well | to obey then, | if a king | demand
The Passing of Arthur, l. 263.

Thus all the lights and shades and variations of tone and voice and color are reproduced by the art of Tennyson. Nature is made to teem with life and to sparkle with beauty.

REFERENCES

The student will find the following books and papers of value in an appreciative and sympathetic study of the *Idylls of the King*.

Alfred Lord Tennyson: a Memoir by his Son.

Tennyson: His Art and Relation to Modern Life, by the Rev. Stopford A. Brooke.

Tennyson's Idylls of the King, edited by William J. Rolfe.

The Poetry of Tennyson, by the Rev. Henry Van Dyke.

The Growth of the Idylls of the King, by Richard Jones, Ph.D.

Essays on Tennyson's Idylls of the King, by Harold Littledale.

Morte Darthur, by Sir Thomas Malory.

"The Idylls of the King," by Henry (Dean) Alford, *Contemporary Review*, January, 1870.

"The Meaning of Mr. Tennyson's King Arthur," *Contemporary Review*, May, 1873.

	Tennyson		Contemporary Biography		Contemporary Literature		Contemporary History
1809	Born at Somersby, Aug. 6.	1809	E. B. Browning.	1809	Irving, *Knickerbocker's History of New York.*		
		——	Darwin, Gladstone, Holmes, and Lincoln born.				
				1810	Scott, *Lady of the Lake.*		
		1811	Thackeray born.			1811	Napoleon at the height of his power.
		1812	Dickens born.	1812	Byron, *Childe Harold.*	1812	War between the United States and England.
						——	Burning of Moscow.
		1813	Wagner born.				
		1814	Millet born.			1814	First locomotive.
						——	Louis XVII in France.
		1815	Bismarck born.			1815	Battle of Waterloo.
1816	Sent to Louth to school.			1816	Bryant, *Thanatopsis.*		
				——	Byron, *Prisoner of Chillon.*		
				1818	Irving, *Sketch Book.*		
				——	Keats, *Endymion.*		
		1819	George Eliot born.	1819	Scott, *Ivanhoe.*		
		——	Ruskin born.				
1820	Returns to Somersby.	1820	Jenny Lind born.	1820	Keats, *Eve of St. Agnes, Hyperion.*	1820	George IV in England.
		——	Spencer born.				
		1821	Keats died.	1821	Cooper, *The Spy.*		
				——	De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater.*		

		1822	Pasteur born.				
		——	Shelley died.				
		——	Matthew Arnold born.				
		1824	Byron died.			1824	First railroad.
		1825	T. H. Huxley born.			1825	Nicholas I in Russia.
				1826	Cooper, *Last of the Mohicans.*		
1827	*Poems by Two Brothers.*	1827	Beethoven died.				
1828	Enters Trinity College.	1828	Schubert died.				
1829	Wins Chancellor's medal with *Timbuctoo.*	1829	Rubinstein born.				
1830	*Poems chiefly Lyrical.*					1830	Revolution in France.
1832	Tour of the Rhine district.	1832	Goethe died.			1832	Reform Bill in England.
——	*Poems.*	——	Scott died.				
		1834	Coleridge died.				
1837	Removed to High Beech.			1837	Hawthorne, *Twice Told Tales.*	1837	Victoria in England.
				——	Emerson, *The American Scholar.*		
				1838	Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby.*		
						1839	Photography.
1840	Went to Tunbridge Wells.					1840	Penny postage in England.
1841	Removed to Boxley.						
1842	*Poems.*						
		1844	Thorwaldsen died.				
				1845	Poe, *The Raven.*		
1847	*The Princess.*			1847	Longfellow, *Evangeline.*		
				1848	Lowell, *Biglow Papers* and *Vision of Sir Launfal.*		
		1849	Poe died.	1849	Ruskin, *Seven Lamps of Architecture.*		
				——	Irving, *Life of Goldsmith.*		
1850	*In Memoriam.*	1850	Wordsworth died.				

	Tennyson		Contemporary Biography		Contemporary Literature		Contemporary History
1850	Laureateship accepted.						
——	Married to Emily Sellwood.						
		1851	Cooper died.				
1852	*Ode to Wellington.*	1852	Webster died.	1852	Thackeray, *Henry Esmond.*	1852	Napoleon III in France
		——	Wellington died.				
						1853–6	Crimean War.
				1854	Longfellow, *Hiawatha.*		
1855	*Charge of the Light Brigade.*			1855	Kingsley, *Westward Ho.*		
——	Received a Doctorship from Oxford.						
——	*Maud and other Poems.*						
		1856	Heine died.				
						1857	Sepoy Mutiny.
				1858	Holmes, *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table.*		
				——	Dickens, *Tale of Two Cities.*		
1859	Purchased Farringford home.	1859	Macaulay died.	1859	Eliot, *Adam Bede.*		
——	*Idylls of the King.*	——	De Quincey died.	——	Irving, *Life of Washington.*		
				1860	Hawthorne, *Marble Faun.*		
		1861	E. B. Browning died.	1861	Eliot, *Silas Marner.*	1861	Civil War in U. S
		1863	Thackeray died.				
1864	*Enoch Arden.*	1864	Hawthorne died.				
		1865	Lincoln assassinated.	1865	Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies.*		
				1866	Whittier, *Snow-Bound.*		
		1867	Faraday died.				

1868	Builds home near Haslemere.	1868	Rossini died.				
1869	*The Holy Grail.*			1869	Browning, *Ring and the Book.*		
		1870	Dickens died.			1870	Franco-Prussian War.
		1871	J. Herschel died.				
		1873	Agassiz died.				
						1874	Alphonso XII in Spain.
1875	*Queen Mary.*	1875	Millet died.				
1876	*Harold.*						
		1878	Bryant died.				
1880	*Ballads and Poems.*	1880	George Eliot died.				
——	Tour of Venice, Bavaria, and the Tyrol.						
		1881	Carlyle died.				
		1882	Darwin died.				
		——	Emerson died.				
		——	Longfellow died.				
		1883	Wagner died.	1883	Stevenson, *Treasure Island.*		
1885	*Tiresias and other Poems.*	1885	Hugo died.				
1886	*Locksley Hall Sixty Years After.*			1886	Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.*		
1887	Visits Devonshire and Cornwall.	1887	Jenny Lind died.			1887	Sadi Carnot, President of France.
1889	*Demeter and other Poems.*						
1892	*Robin Hood.*						
——	Died at Aldworth, Oct. 6.						

KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

"BEDIVERE — 'First made and latest left of all the knights';
LANCELOT — 'His warrior whom he loved and honored most';
GAWAIN — 'A reckless and irreverent knight was he';
MODRED — 'Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom';
GARETH — 'Underwent the sooty yoke of kitchen vassalage';
KAY — 'No mellow master of the meats and drinks';
GERAINT — 'A tributary prince of Devon,' married to Enid;
BALIN — 'The Savage'; and Balan, his brother;
PERCIVALE — 'Whom Arthur and his knighthood called The Pure';
GALAHAD — 'But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail';
BORS — 'A square-set man and honest,' of Lancelot's kin;
PELLEAS — 'Of the Isles'; enamored of Ettarre;
TRISTRAM — 'Of the Woods'; slain by Mark, Isolt's husband."

Rowe.

IDYLLS OF THE KING

GARETH AND LYNETTE

The last tall son of Lot and Bellicent,
And tallest, Gareth, in a showerful spring
Stared at the spate. A slender-shafted pine
Lost footing, fell, and so was whirl'd away.
"How he went down," said Gareth, "as a false knight
Or evil king before my lance, if lance
Were mine to use — O senseless cataract,
Bearing all down in thy precipitancy —
And yet thou art but swollen with cold snows
And mine is living blood: thou dost His will,
The Maker's, and not knowest, and I that know,
Have strength and wit, in my good mother's hall
Linger with vacillating obedience,
Prison'd, and kept and coax'd and whistled to —
Since the good mother holds me still a child!
Good mother is bad mother unto me!
A worse were better; yet no worse would I.
Heaven yield her for it, but in me put force
To weary her ears with one continuous prayer,
Until she let me fly discaged to sweep
In ever-highering eagle-circles up
To the great Sun of Glory, and thence swoop
Down upon all things base, and dash them dead,
A knight of Arthur, working out his will,

To cleanse the world. Why, Gawain, when he came
With Modred hither in the summer-time,
Ask'd me to tilt with him, the proven knight.
Modred for want of worthier was the judge.
Then I so shook him in the saddle, he said,
'Thou hast half prevail'd against me,' said so — he —
Tho' Modred biting his thin lips was mute,
For he is alway sullen: what care I?"

And Gareth went, and hovering round her chair
Ask'd, "Mother, tho' ye count me still the child,
Sweet mother, do ye love the child?" She laughed,
"Thou art but a wild-goose to question it."
"Then, mother, an ye love the child," he said,
"Being a goose and rather tame than wild,
Hear the child's story." "Yea, my well-beloved,
An 't were but of the goose and golden eggs."

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes:
"Nay, nay, good mother, but this egg of mine
Was finer gold than any goose can lay;
For this an eagle, a royal eagle, laid
Almost beyond eye-reach, on such a palm
As glitters gilded in thy Book of Hours.
And there was ever haunting round the palm
A lusty youth, but poor, who often saw
The splendor sparkling from aloft, and thought,
'An I could climb and lay my hand upon it,
Then were I wealthier than a leash of kings.'
But ever when he reach'd a hand to climb,
One that had loved him from his childhood caught
And stay'd him, 'Climb not lest thou break thy neck,
I charge thee by my love,' and so the boy,

Sweet mother, neither clomb nor brake his neck,
But brake his very heart in pining for it,
And past away."

To whom the mother said,
"True love, sweet son, had risk'd himself and climb'd,
And handed down the golden treasure to him."

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes:
"Gold? said I gold? — ay then, why he, or she,
Or whosoe'er it was, or half the world
Had ventured — *had* the thing I spake of been
Mere gold — but this was all of that true steel
Whereof they forged the brand Excalibur,
And lightnings play'd about it in the storm,
And all the little fowl were flurried at it,
And there were cries and clashings in the nest,
That sent him from his senses: let me go."

Then Bellicent bemoan'd herself and said:
"Hast thou no pity upon my loneliness?
Lo, where thy father Lot beside the hearth
Lies like a log, and all but smoulder'd out!
For ever since when traitor to the King
He fought against him in the barons' war,
And Arthur gave him back his territory,
His age hath slowly droopt, and now lies there
A yet-warm corpse, and yet unburiable,
No more; nor sees, nor hears, nor speaks, nor knows.
And both thy brethren are in Arthur's hall,
Albeit neither loved with that full love
I feel for thee, nor worthy such a love.
Stay therefore thou; red berries charm the bird,

And thee, mine innocent, the jousts, the wars,
Who never knewest finger-ache, nor pang
Of wrench'd or broken limb — an often chance
In those brain-stunning shocks, and tourney-falls,
Frights to my heart; but stay: follow the deer
By these tall firs and our fast-falling burns;
So make thy manhood mightier day by day;
Sweet is the chase: and I will seek thee out
Some comfortable bride and fair, to grace
Thy climbing life, and cherish my prone year,
Till falling into Lot's forgetfulness
I know not thee, myself, nor anything.
Stay, my best son! ye are yet more boy than man."

Then Gareth: "An ye hold me yet for child,
Hear yet once more the story of the child.
For, mother, there was once a king, like ours.
The prince his heir, when tall and marriageable,
Ask'd for a bride; and thereupon the king
Set two before him. One was fair, strong, arm'd —
But to be won by force — and many men
Desired her; one, good lack, no man desired.
And these were the conditions of the king:
That save he won the first by force, he needs
Must wed that other, whom no man desired,
A red-faced bride who knew herself so vile
That evermore she long'd to hide herself,
Nor fronted man or woman, eye to eye —
Yea — some she cleaved to, but they died of her.
And one — they call'd her Fame; and one — O mother.
How can ye keep me tether'd to you? — Shame.
Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.
Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King,

Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King —
Else, wherefore born?"

To whom the mother said:
"Sweet son, for there be many who deem him not,
Or will not deem him, wholly proven King —
Albeit in mine own heart I knew him King
When I was frequent with him in my youth,
And heard him kingly speak, and doubted him
No more than he, himself; but felt him mine,
Of closest kin to me: yet — wilt thou leave
Thine easeful biding here, and risk thine all,
Life, limbs, for one that is not proven King?
Stay, till the cloud that settles round his birth
Hath lifted but a little. Stay, sweet son."

And Gareth answer'd quickly: "Not an hour,
So that ye yield me — I will walk thro' fire,
Mother, to gain it — your full leave to go.
Not proven, who swept the dust of ruin'd Rome
From off the threshold of the realm, and crush'd
The idolaters, and made the people free?
Who should be king save him who makes us free?"

So when the Queen, who long had sought in vain
To break him from the intent to which he grew,
Found her son's will unwaveringly one,
She answer'd craftily: "Will ye walk thro' fire?
Who walks thro' fire will hardly heed the smoke.
Ay, go then, an ye must: only one proof,
Before thou ask the King to make thee knight,
Of thine obedience and thy love to me,
Thy mother, — I demand."

And Gareth cried:
"A hard one, or a hundred, so I go.
Nay — quick! the proof to prove me to the quick!"

But slowly spake the mother looking at him:
"Prince, thou shalt go disguised to Arthur's hall,
And hire thyself to serve for meats and drinks
Among the scullions and the kitchen-knaves,
And those that hand the dish across the bar.
Nor shalt thou tell thy name to any one.
And thou shalt serve a twelvemonth and a day."

For so the Queen believed that when her son
Beheld his only way to glory lead
Low down thro' villain kitchen-vassalage,
Her own true Gareth was too princely-proud
To pass thereby; so should he rest with her,
Closed in her castle from the sound of arms.

Silent awhile was Gareth, then replied:
"The thrall in person may be free in soul,
And I shall see the jousts. Thy son am I,
And, since thou art my mother, must obey.
I therefore yield me freely to thy will;
For hence will I, disguised, and hire myself
To serve with scullions and with kitchen-knaves;
Nor tell my name to any — no, not the King."

Gareth awhile linger'd. The mother's eye
Full of the wistful fear that he would go,
And turning toward him wheresoe'er he turn'd,
Perplext his outward purpose, till an hour
When, waken'd by the wind which with full voice

Swept bellowing thro' the darkness on to dawn,
He rose, and out of slumber calling two
That still had tended on him from his birth,
Before the wakeful mother heard him, went.

The three were clad like tillers of the soil.
Southward they set their faces. The birds made
Melody on branch and melody in mid air.
The damp hill-slopes were quicken'd into green,
And the live green had kindled into flowers,
For it was past the time of Easter-day.

So, when their feet were planted on the plain
That broaden'd toward the base of Camelot,
Far off they saw the silver-misty morn
Rolling her smoke about the royal mount,
That rose between the forest and the field.
At times the summit of the high city flash'd;
At times the spires and turrets half-way down
Prick'd thro' the mist; at times the great gate shone
Only, that open'd on the field below:
Anon, the whole fair city had disappear'd.

Then those who went with Gareth were amazed,
One crying, "Let us go no further, lord:
Here is a city of enchanters, built
By fairy kings." The second echo'd him,
"Lord, we have heard from our wise man at home
To northward, that this king is not the King,
But only changeling out of Fairyland,
Who drave the heathen hence by sorcery
And Merlin's glamour." Then the first again,
"Lord, there is no such city anywhere,
But all a vision."

Gareth answer'd them
With laughter, swearing he had glamour enow
In his own blood, his princedom, youth, and hopes,
To plunge old Merlin in the Arabian sea;
So push'd them all unwilling toward the gate.
And there was no gate like it under heaven.
For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined
And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,
The Lady of the Lake stood: all her dress
Wept from her sides as water flowing away;
But like the cross her great and goodly arms
Stretch'd under all the cornice and upheld:
And drops of water fell from either hand;
And down from one a sword was hung, from one
A censer, either worn with wind and storm;
And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish;
And in the space to left of her, and right,
Were Arthur's wars in weird devices done,
New things and old co-twisted, as if Time
Were nothing, so inveterately that men
Were giddy gazing there; and over all
High on the top were those three queens, the friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need.

Then those with Gareth for so long a space
Stared at the figures that at last it seem'd
The dragon-boughts and elvish emblemings
Began to move, seethe, twine, and curl: they call'd
To Gareth, "Lord, the gateway is alive."

And Gareth likewise on them fixt his eyes
So long that even to him they seem'd to move.
Out of the city a blast of music peal'd.

Back from the gate started the three, to whom
From out thereunder came an ancient man
Long-bearded, saying, "Who be ye, my sons?"

Then Gareth: "We be tillers of the soil,
Who leaving share in furrow come to see
The glories of our King: but these, my men,—
Your city moved so weirdly in the mist—
Doubt if the King be king at all, or come
From Fairyland; and whether this be built
By magic, and by fairy kings and queens;
Or whether there be any city at all,
Or all a vision: and this music now
Hath scared them both, but tell thou these the truth."

Then that old Seer made answer, playing on him
And saying: "Son, I have seen the good ship sail
Keel upward and mast downward, in the heavens,
And solid turrets topsy-turvy in air:
And here is truth; but an it please thee not,
Take thou the truth as thou hast told it me.
For truly, as thou sayest, a fairy king
And fairy queens have built the city, son;
They came from out a sacred mountain-cleft
Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand,
And built it to the music of their harps.
And, as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son,
For there is nothing in it as it seems
Saving the King; tho' some there be that hold
The King a shadow, and the city real;
Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass
Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become
A thrall to his enchantments, for the King

Will bind thee by such vows as is a shame
A man should not be bound by, yet the which
No man can keep; but, so thou dread to swear,
Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide
Without, among the cattle of the field.
For an ye heard a music, like enow
They are building still, seeing the city is built
To music, therefore never built at all,
And therefore built for ever."

Gareth spake
Anger'd: "Old master, reverence thine own beard
That looks as white as utter truth, and seems
Wellnigh as long as thou art statured tall!
Why mockest thou the stranger that hath been
To thee fair-spoken?"

But the Seer replied:
"Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards:
'Confusion, and illusion, and relation,
Elusion, and occasion, and evasion'?
I mock thee not but as thou mockest me,
And all that see thee, for thou art not who
Thou seemest, but I know thee who thou art.
And now thou goest up to mock the King,
Who cannot brook the shadow of any lie."

Unmockingly the mocker ending here,
Turn'd to the right, and past along the plain;
Whom Gareth looking after said: "My men,
Our one white lie sits like a little ghost
Here on the threshold of our enterprise.
Let love be blamed for it, not she, nor I:
Well, we will make amends."

With all good cheer
He spake and laugh'd, then enter'd with his twain
Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces
And stately, rich in emblem and the work
Of ancient kings who did their days in stone;
Which Merlin's hand, the Mage at Arthur's court,
Knowing all arts, had touch'd, and everywhere,
At Arthur's ordinance, tipt with lessening peak
And pinnacle, and had made it spire to heaven.
And ever and anon a knight would pass
Outward, or inward to the hall: his arms
Clash'd; and the sound was good to Gareth's ear.
And out of bower and casement shyly glanced
Eyes of pure women, wholesome stars of love;
And all about a healthful people stept
As in the presence of a gracious king.

Then into hall Gareth ascending heard
A voice, the voice of Arthur, and beheld
Far over heads in that long-vaulted hall
The splendor of the presence of the King
Throned, and delivering doom — and look'd no more —
But felt his young heart hammering in his ears,
And thought, "For this half-shadow of a lie
The truthful King will doom me when I speak."
Yet pressing on, tho' all in fear to find
Sir Gawain or Sir Modred, saw nor one
Nor other, but in all the listening eyes
Of those tall knights that ranged about the throne
Clear honor shining like the dewy star
Of dawn, and faith in their great King, with pure
Affection, and the light of victory,
And glory gain'd, and evermore to gain.

Then came a widow crying to the King:
"A boon, Sir King! Thy father, Uther, reft
From my dead lord a field with violence;
For howsoe'er at first he proffer'd gold,
Yet, for the field was pleasant in our eyes,
We yielded not; and then he reft us of it
Perforce and left us neither gold nor field."

Said Arthur, "Whether would ye? gold or field?"
To whom the woman weeping, "Nay, my lord,
The field was pleasant in my husband's eye."

And Arthur: "Have thy pleasant field again,
And thrice the gold for Uther's use thereof,
According to the years. No boon is here,
But justice, so thy say be proven true.
Accursed, who from the wrongs his father did
Would shape himself a right!"

And while she past,
Came yet another widow crying to him:
"A boon, Sir King! Thine enemy, King, am I.
With thine own hand thou slewest my dear lord,
A knight of Uther in the barons' war,
When Lot and many another rose and fought
Against thee, saying thou wert basely born.
I held with these, and loathe to ask thee aught.
Yet lo! my husband's brother had my son
Thrall'd in his castle, and hath starved him dead,
And standeth seized of that inheritance
Which thou that slewest the sire hast left the son.
So, tho' I scarce can ask it thee for hate,
Grant me some knight to do the battle for me,
Kill the foul thief, and wreak me for my son."

Then strode a good knight forward, crying to him,
"A boon, Sir King! I am her kinsman, I.
Give me to right her wrong, and slay the man."

Then came Sir Kay, the seneschal, and cried,
"A boon, Sir King! even that thou grant her none,
This railer, that hath mock'd thee in full hall—
None; or the wholesome boon of gyve and gag."

But Arthur: "We sit King, to help the wrong'd
Thro' all our realm. The woman loves her lord.
Peace to thee, woman, with thy loves and hates!
The kings of old had doom'd thee to the flames;
Aurelius Emrys would have scourged thee dead,
And Uther slit thy tongue: but get thee hence—
Lest that rough humor of the kings of old
Return upon me! Thou that art her kin,
Go likewise; lay him low and slay him not,
But bring him here, that I may judge the right,
According to the justice of the King:
Then, be he guilty, by that deathless King
Who lived and died for men, the man shall die."

Then came in hall the messenger of Mark,
A name of evil savor in the land,
The Cornish king. In either hand he bore
What dazzled all, and shone far-off as shines
A field of charlock in the sudden sun
Between two showers, a cloth of palest gold,
Which down he laid before the throne, and knelt,
Delivering that his lord, the vassal king,
Was even upon his way to Camelot;
For having heard that Arthur of his grace

Had made his goodly cousin Tristram knight,
And, for himself was of the greater state,
Being a king, he trusted his liege-lord
Would yield him this large honor all the more;
So pray'd him well to accept this cloth of gold,
In token of true heart and fealty.

Then Arthur cried to rend the cloth, to rend
In pieces, and so cast it on the hearth.
An oak-tree smoulder'd there. "The goodly knight!
What! shall the shield of Mark stand among these?"
For, midway down the side of that long hall,
A stately pile, — whereof along the front,
Some blazon'd, some but carven, and some blank,
There ran a treble range of stony shields, —
Rose, and high-arching over-brow'd the hearth.
And under every shield a knight was named.
For this was Arthur's custom in his hall:
When some good knight had done one noble deed,
His arms were carven only; but if twain,
His arms were blazon'd also; but if none,
The shield was blank and bare, without a sign
Saving the name beneath: and Gareth saw
The shield of Gawain blazon'd rich and bright,
And Modred's blank as death; and Arthur cried
To rend the cloth and cast it on the hearth.

"More like are we to reave him of his crown
Than make him knight because men call him king.
The kings we found, ye know we stay'd their hands
From war among themselves, but left them kings;
Of whom were any bounteous, merciful,
Truth-speaking, brave, good livers, them we enroll'd

Among us, and they sit within our hall.
But Mark hath tarnish'd the great name of king,
As Mark would sully the low state of churl;
And, seeing he hath sent us cloth of gold,
Return, and meet, and hold him from our eyes,
Lest we should lap him up in cloth of lead,
Silenced for ever — craven — a man of plots,
Craft, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings —
No fault of thine: let Kay the seneschal
Look to thy wants, and send thee satisfied —
Accursed, who strikes nor lets the hand be seen!"

And many another suppliant crying came
With noise of ravage wrought by beast and man,
And evermore a knight would ride away.

Last, Gareth leaning both hands heavily
Down on the shoulders of the twain, his men,
Approach'd between them toward the King, and ask'd,
"A boon, Sir King," — his voice was all ashamed, —
"For see ye not how weak and hunger-worn
I seem — leaning on these? grant me to serve
For meat and drink among thy kitchen-knaves
A twelvemonth and a day, nor seek my name.
Hereafter I will fight."

To him the King:
"A goodly youth and worth a goodlier boon!
But so thou wilt no goodlier, then must Kay,
The master of the meats and drinks, be thine."

He rose and past; then Kay, a man of mien
Wan-sallow as the plant that feels itself
Root-bitten by white lichen:

"Lo ye now!
This fellow hath broken from some abbey, where,
God wot, he had not beef and brewis enow,
However that might chance! but an he work,
Like any pigeon will I cram his crop,
And sleeker shall he shine than any hog."

Then Lancelot standing near: "Sir Seneschal,
Sleuth-hound thou knowest, and gray, and all the hounds;
A horse thou knowest, a man thou dost not know:
Broad brows and fair, a fluent hair and fine,
High nose, a nostril large and fine, and hands,
Large, fair, and fine! — Some young lad's mystery —
But, or from sheepcot or king's hall, the boy
Is noble-natured. Treat him with all grace,
Lest he should come to shame thy judging of him."

Then Kay: "What murmurest thou of mystery?
Think ye this fellow will poison the King's dish?
Nay, for he spake too fool-like: mystery!
Tut, an the lad were noble, he had ask'd
For horse and armor: fair and fine, forsooth!
Sir Fine-face, Sir Fair-hands? but see thou to it
That thine own fineness, Lancelot, some fine day
Undo thee not — and leave my man to me."

So Gareth all for glory underwent
The sooty yoke of kitchen-vassalage,
Ate with young lads his portion by the door,
And couch'd at night with grimy kitchen-knaves.
And Lancelot ever spake him pleasantly,
But Kay the seneschal, who loved him not,
Would hustle and harry him, and labor him

Beyond his comrade of the hearth, and set
To turn the broach, draw water, or hew wood,
Or grosser tasks; and Gareth bow'd himself
With all obedience to the King, and wrought
All kind of service with a noble ease
That graced the lowliest act in doing it,
And when the thralls had talk among themselves,
And one would praise the love that linkt the King
And Lancelot — how the King had saved his life
In battle twice, and Lancelot once the King's —
For Lancelot was the first in tournament,
But Arthur mightiest on the battle-field —
Gareth was glad. Or if some other told
How once the wandering forester at dawn,
Far over the blue tarns and hazy seas,
On Caer-Eryri's highest found the King,
A naked babe, of whom the Prophet spake,
"He passes to the Isle Avilion,
He passes and is heal'd and cannot die"—
Gareth was glad. But if their talk were foul,
Then would he whistle rapid as any lark,
Or carol some old roundelay, and so loud
That first they mock'd, but, after, reverenced him.
Or Gareth, telling some prodigious tale
Of knights who sliced a red life-bubbling way
Thro' twenty folds of twisted dragon, held
All in a gap-mouth'd circle his good mates
Lying or sitting round him, idle hands,
Charm'd; till Sir Kay, the seneschal, would come
Blustering upon them, like a sudden wind
Among dead leaves, and drive them all apart.
Or when the thralls had sport among themselves,
So there were any trial of mastery,

He, by two yards in casting bar or stone,
Was counted best; and if there chanced a joust,
So that Sir Kay nodded him leave to go,
Would hurry thither, and when he saw the knights
Clash like the coming and retiring wave,
And the spear spring, and good horse reel, the boy
Was half beyond himself for ecstasy.

So for a month he wrought among the thralls;
But in the weeks that follow'd, the good Queen,
Repentant of the word she made him swear,
And saddening in her childless castle, sent,
Between the in-crescent and de-crescent moon,
Arms for her son, and loosed him from his vow.

This, Gareth hearing from a squire of Lot
With whom he used to play at tourney once,
When both were children, and in lonely haunts
Would scratch a ragged oval on the sand,
And each at either dash from either end —
Shame never made girl redder than Gareth joy.
He laugh'd; he sprang. "Out of the smoke, at once
I leap from Satan's foot to Peter's knee —
These news be mine, none other's — nay, the King's —
Descend into the city:" whereon he sought
The King alone, and found, and told him all.

"I have stagger'd thy strong Gawain in a tilt
For pastime; yea, he said it: joust can I.
Make me thy knight — in secret! let my name
Be hidden, and give me the first quest, I spring
Like flame from ashes."

Here the King's calm eye
Fell on, and check'd, and made him flush, and bow

Lowly, to kiss his hand, who answer'd him:
"Son, the good mother let me know thee here,
And sent her wish that I would yield thee thine.
Make thee my knight? my knights are sworn to vows
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,
And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,
And uttermost obedience to the King."

Then Gareth, lightly springing from his knees:
"My King, for hardihood I can promise thee.
For uttermost obedience make demand
Of whom ye gave me to, the Seneschal,
No mellow master of the meats and drinks!
And as for love, God wot, I love not yet,
But love I shall, God willing."

And the King:
"Make thee my knight in secret? yea, but he,
Our noblest brother, and our truest man,
And one with me in all, he needs must know."

"Let Lancelot know, my King, let Lancelot know,
Thy noblest and thy truest!"

And the King:
"But wherefore would ye men should wonder at you?
Nay, rather for the sake of me, their King,
And the deed's sake my knighthood do the deed,
Than to be noised of."

Merrily Gareth ask'd:
"Have I not earn'd my cake in baking of it?
Let be my name until I make my name!
My deeds will speak: it is but for a day."

So with a kindly hand on Gareth's arm
Smiled the great King, and half-unwillingly
Loving his lusty youthhood yielded to him.
Then, after summoning Lancelot privily:
"I have given him the first quest: he is not proven.
Look therefore, when he calls for this in hall,
Thou get to horse and follow him far away.
Cover the lions on thy shield, and see,
Far as thou mayest, he be nor ta'en nor slain."

Then that same day there past into the hall
A damsel of high lineage, and a brow
May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom,
Hawk-eyes; and lightly was her slender nose
Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower:
She into hall past with her page and cried:

"O King, for thou hast driven the foe without,
See to the foe within! bridge, ford, beset
By bandits, every one that owns a tower
The lord of half a league. Why sit ye there?
Rest would I not, Sir King, an I were king,
Till even the lonest hold were all as free
From cursed bloodshed as thine altar-cloth
From that best blood it is a sin to spill."

"Comfort thyself," said Arthur, "I nor mine
Rest: so my knighthood keep the vows they swore,
The wastest moorland of our realm shall be
Safe, damsel, as the centre of this hall.
What is thy name? thy need?"

"My name?" she said —
"Lynette, my name; noble; my need, a knight

To combat for my sister, Lyonors,
A lady of high lineage, of great lands,
And comely, yea, and comelier than myself.
She lives in Castle Perilous: a river
Runs in three loops about her living-place;
And o'er it are three passings, and three knights
Defend the passings, brethren, and a fourth,
And of that four the mightiest, holds her stay'd
In her own castle, and so besieges her
To break her will, and make her wed with him;
And but delays his purport till thou send
To do the battle with him thy chief man
Sir Lancelot, whom he trusts to overthrow;
Then wed, with glory: but she will not wed
Save whom she loveth, or a holy life.
Now therefore have I come for Lancelot."

Then Arthur mindful of Sir Gareth ask'd:
"Damsel, ye know this Order lives to crush
All wrongers of the realm. But say, these four,
Who be they? What the fashion of the men?"

"They be of foolish fashion, O Sir King,
The fashion of that old knight-errantry
Who ride abroad, and do but what they will;
Courteous or bestial from the moment, such
As have nor law nor king; and three of these
Proud in their fantasy call themselves the Day,
Morning-Star, and Noon-Sun, and Evening-Star,
Being strong fools; and never a whit more wise
The fourth, who alway rideth arm'd in black,
A huge man-beast of boundless savagery.
He names himself the Night and oftener Death,

And wears a helmet mounted with a skull,
And bears a skeleton figured on his arms,
To show that who may slay or scape the three,
Slain by himself, shall enter endless night.
And all these four be fools, but mighty men,
And therefore am I come for Lancelot."

Hereat Sir Gareth call'd from where he rose,
A head with kindling eyes above the throng,
"A boon, Sir King—this quest!" then—for he mark'd
Kay near him groaning like a wounded bull—
"Yea, King, thou knowest thy kitchen-knave am I,
And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I,
And I can topple over a hundred such.
Thy promise, King," and Arthur glancing at him,
Brought down a momentary brow. "Rough, sudden,
And pardonable, worthy to be knight—
Go therefore," and all hearers were amazed.

But on the damsel's forehead shame, pride, wrath
Slew the may-white: she lifted either arm,
"Fie on thee, King! I ask'd for thy chief knight,
And thou hast given me but a kitchen-knave."
Then ere a man in hall could stay her, turn'd,
Fled down the lane of access to the King,
Took horse, descended the slope street, and past
The weird white gate, and paused without, beside
The field of tourney, murmuring "kitchen-knave!"

Now two great entries open'd from the hall,
At one end one that gave upon a range
Of level pavement where the King would pace

At sunrise, gazing over plain and wood;
And down from this a lordly stairway sloped
Till lost in blowing trees and tops of towers;
And out by this main doorway past the King.
But one was counter to the hearth, and rose
High that the highest-crested helm could ride
Therethro' nor graze; and by this entry fled
The damsel in her wrath, and on to this
Sir Gareth strode, and saw without the door
King Arthur's gift, the worth of half a town,
A war-horse of the best, and near it stood
The two that out of north had follow'd him.
This bare a maiden shield, a casque; that held
The horse, the spear; whereat Sir Gareth loosed
A cloak that dropt from collar-bone to heel,
A cloth of roughest web, and cast it down,
And from it, like a fuel-smother'd fire
That lookt half-dead, brake bright, and flash'd as those
Dull-coated things, that making slide apart
Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns
A jewell'd harness, ere they pass and fly.
So Gareth ere he parted flash'd in arms.
Then as he donn'd the helm, and took the shield
And mounted horse and graspt a spear, of grain
Storm-strengthen'd on a windy site, and tipt
With trenchant steel, around him slowly prest
The people, while from out of kitchen came
The thralls in throng, and seeing who had work'd
Lustier than any, and whom they could but love,
Mounted in arms, threw up their caps and cried,
"God bless the King, and all his fellowship!"
And on thro' lanes of shouting Gareth rode
Down the slope street, and past without the gate.

So Gareth past with joy; but as the cur
Pluckt from the cur he fights with, ere his cause
Be cool'd by fighting, follows, being named,
His owner, but remembers all, and growls
Remembering, so Sir Kay beside the door
Mutter'd in scorn of Gareth whom he used
To harry and hustle.

"Bound upon a quest
With horse and arms — the King hath past his time —
My scullion knave! Thralls, to your work again,
For an your fire be low ye kindle mine!
Will there be dawn in West and eve in East?
Begone! — my knave! — belike and like enow
Some old head-blow not heeded in his youth
So shook his wits they wander in his prime —
Crazed! How the villain lifted up his voice,
Nor shamed to bawl himself a kitchen-knave!
Tut, he was tame and meek enow with me,
Till peacock'd up with Lancelot's noticing.
Well — I will after my loud knave, and learn
Whether he know me for his master yet.
Out of the smoke he came, and so my lance
Hold, by God's grace, he shall into the mire —
Thence, if the King awaken from his craze,
Into the smoke again."

But Lancelot said:
"Kay, wherefore wilt thou go against the King,
For that did never he whereon ye rail,
But ever meekly served the King in thee?
Abide: take counsel; for this lad is great
And lusty, and knowing both of lance and sword."

"Tut, tell not me," said Kay, "ye are overfine
To mar stout knaves with foolish courtesies:"
Then mounted, on thro' silent faces rode
Down the slope city, and out beyond the gate.

But by the field of tourney lingering yet
Mutter'd the damsel: "Wherefore did the King
Scorn me? for, were Sir Lancelot lackt, at least
He might have yielded to me one of those
Who tilt for lady's love and glory here,
Rather than — O sweet heaven! O fie upon him! —
His kitchen-knave."

To whom Sir Gareth drew —
And there were none but few goodlier than he —
Shining in arms, "Damsel, the quest is mine.
Lead, and I follow." She thereat, as one
That smells a foul-flesh'd agaric in the holt,
And deems it carrion of some woodland thing,
Or shrew, or weasel, nipt her slender nose
With petulant thumb and finger, shrilling, "Hence!
Avoid, thou smellest all of kitchen-grease.
And look who comes behind;" for there was Kay.
"Knowest thou not me? thy master? I am Kay.
We lack thee by the hearth."

And Gareth to him,
"Master no more! too well I know thee, ay —
The most ungentle knight in Arthur's hall."
"Have at thee then," said Kay: they shock'd, and Kay
Fell shoulder-slipt, and Gareth cried again,
"Lead, and I follow," and fast away she fled.

But after sod and shingle ceased to fly
Behind her, and the heart of her good horse

Was nigh to burst with violence of the beat,
Perforce she stay'd, and overtaken spoke:

"What doest thou, scullion, in my fellowship?
Deem'st thou that I accept thee aught the more
Or love thee better, that by some device
Full cowardly, or by mere unhappiness,
Thou hast overthrown and slain thy master — thou! —
Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon! — to me
Thou smellest all of kitchen as before."

"Damsel," Sir Gareth answer'd gently, "say
Whate'er ye will, but whatsoe'er ye say,
I leave not till I finish this fair quest,
Or die therefor."

"Ay, wilt thou finish it?
Sweet lord, how like a noble knight he talks!
The listening rogue hath caught the manner of it.
But, knave, anon thou shalt be met with, knave,
And then by such a one that thou for all
The kitchen brewis that was ever supt
Shalt not once dare to look him in the face."

"I shall assay," said Gareth with a smile
That madden'd her, and away she flash'd again
Down the long avenues of a boundless wood,
And Gareth following was again beknaved:

"Sir Kitchen-knave, I have miss'd the only way
Where Arthur's men are set along the wood;
The wood is nigh as full of thieves as leaves:
If both be slain, I am rid of thee; but yet,
Sir Scullion, canst thou use that spit of thine?
Fight, an thou canst: I have miss'd the only way."

So till the dusk that follow'd evensong
Rode on the two, reviler and reviled;
Then after one long slope was mounted, saw,
Bowl-shaped, thro' tops of many thousand pines
A gloomy-gladed hollow slowly sink
To westward — in the deeps whereof a mere,
Round as the red eye of an eagle-owl,
Under the half-dead sunset glared; and shouts
Ascended, and there brake a servingman
Flying from out of the black wood, and crying,
"They have bound my lord to cast him in the mere."
Then Gareth, "Bound am I to right the wrong'd,
But straitlier bound am I to bide with thee."
And when the damsel spake contemptuously,
"Lead, and I follow," Gareth cried again,
"Follow, I lead!" so down among the pines
He plunged; and there, black-shadow'd nigh the mere,
And mid-thigh-deep in bulrushes and reed,
Saw six tall men haling a seventh along,
A stone about his neck to drown him in it.
Three with good blows he quieted, but three
Fled thro' the pines; and Gareth loosed the stone
From off his neck, then in the mere beside
Tumbled it; oilily bubbled up the mere.
Last, Gareth loosed his bonds and on free feet
Set him, a stalwart baron, Arthur's friend.

"Well that ye came, or else these caitiff rogues
Had wreak'd themselves on me; good cause is theirs
To hate me, for my wont hath ever been
To catch my thief, and then like vermin here
Drown him, and with a stone about his neck;
And under this wan water many of them

Lie rotting, but at night let go the stone,
And rise, and flickering in a grimly light
Dance on the mere. Good now, ye have saved a life
Worth somewhat as the cleanser of this wood.
And fain would I reward thee worshipfully.
What guerdon will ye?"

Gareth sharply spake:
"None! for the deed's sake have I done the deed,
In uttermost obedience to the King.
But wilt thou yield this damsel harborage?"

Whereat the baron saying, "I well believe
You be of Arthur's Table," a light laugh
Broke from Lynette: "Ay, truly of a truth,
And in a sort, being Arthur's kitchen-knave! —
But deem not I accept thee aught the more,
Scullion, for running sharply with thy spit
Down on a rout of craven foresters.
A thresher with his flail had scatter'd them.
Nay — for thou smellest of the kitchen still.
But an this lord will yield us harborage,
Well."

So she spake. A league beyond the wood,
All in a full-fair manor and a rich,
His towers, where that day a feast had been
Held in high hall, and many a viand left,
And many a costly cate, received the three.
And there they placed a peacock in his pride
Before the damsel, and the baron set
Gareth beside her, but at once she rose.

"Meseems, that here is much discourtesy,
Setting this knave, Lord Baron, at my side.
Hear me — this morn I stood in Arthur's hall,
And pray'd the King would grant me Lancelot
To fight the brotherhood of Day and Night —
The last a monster unsubduable
Of any save of him for whom I call'd —
Suddenly bawls this frontless kitchen-knave,
'The quest is mine; thy kitchen-knave am I,
And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I.'
Then Arthur all at once gone mad replies,
'Go therefore,' and so gives the quest to him —
Him — here — a villain fitter to stick swine
Than ride abroad redressing women's wrong,
Or sit beside a noble gentlewoman."

Then half-ashamed and part-amazed, the lord
Now look'd at one and now at other, left
The damsel by the peacock in his pride,
And, seating Gareth at another board,
Sat down beside him, ate and then began:

"Friend, whether thou be kitchen-knave, or not,
Or whether it be the maiden s fantasy,
And whether she be mad, or else the King,
Or both or neither, or thyself be mad,
I ask not: but thou strikest a strong stroke,
For strong thou art and goodly therewithal
And saver of my life; and therefore now,
For here be mighty men to joust with, weigh
Whether thou wilt not with thy damsel back
To crave again Sir Lancelot of the King.
Thy pardon; I but speak for thine avail,
The saver of my life."

And Gareth said,
"Full pardon, but I follow up the quest,
Despite of Day and Night and Death and Hell."

So when, next morn, the lord whose life he saved
Had, some brief space, convey'd them on their way
And left them with God-speed, Sir Gareth spake,
"Lead, and I follow." Haughtily she replied:

"I fly no more: I allow thee for an hour.
Lion and stoat have isled together, knave,
In time of flood. Nay, furthermore, methinks
Some ruth is mine for thee. Back wilt thou, fool?
For hard by here is one will overthrow
And slay thee; then will I to court again,
And shame the King for only yielding me
My champion from the ashes of his hearth."

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd courteously:
"Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed.
Allow me for mine hour, and thou wilt find
My fortunes all as fair as hers who lay
Among the ashes and wedded the King's son."

Then to the shore of one of those long loops
Wherethro' the serpent river coil'd, they came.
Rough-thicketed were the banks and steep; the stream
Full, narrow; this a bridge of single arc
Took at a leap; and on the further side
Arose a silk pavilion, gay with gold
In streaks and rays, and all Lent-lily in hue,
Save that the dome was purple, and above,
Crimson, a slender banneret fluttering.

And therebefore the lawless warrior paced
Unarm'd, and calling, "Damsel, is this he,
The champion thou hast brought from Arthur's hall?
For whom we let thee pass." "Nay, nay," she said,
"Sir Morning-Star. The King in utter scorn
Of thee and thy much folly hath sent thee here
His kitchen-knave: and look thou to thyself:
See that he fall not on thee suddenly,
And slay thee unarm'd; he is not knight but knave."

Then at his call, "O daughters of the Dawn,
And servants of the Morning-Star, approach,
Arm me," from out the silken curtain-folds
Bare-footed and bare-headed three fair girls
In gilt and rosy raiment came: their feet
In dewy grasses glisten'd; and the hair
All over glanced with dewdrop or with gem
Like sparkles in the stone Avanturine.
These arm'd him in blue arms, and gave a shield
Blue also, and thereon the morning star.
And Gareth silent gazed upon the knight,
Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought,
Glorying; and in the stream beneath him shone,
Immingled with Heaven's azure waveringly,
The gay pavilion and the naked feet,
His arms, the rosy raiment, and the star.

Then she that watch'd him: "Wherefore stare ye so?
Thou shakest in thy fear: there yet is time:
Flee down the valley before he get to horse.
Who will cry shame? Thou art not knight but knave."

Said Gareth: "Damsel, whether knave or knight,
Far liefer had I fight a score of times

Than hear thee so missay me and revile.
Fair words were best for him who fights for thee;
But truly foul are better, for they send
That strength of anger thro' mine arms, I know
That I shall overthrow him."

And he that bore
The star, when mounted, cried from o'er the bridge:
"A kitchen-knave, and sent in scorn of me!
Such fight not I, but answer scorn with scorn.
For this were shame to do him further wrong
Than set him on his feet, and take his horse
And arms, and so return him to the King.
Come, therefore, leave thy lady lightly, knave.
Avoid: for it beseemeth not a knave
To ride with such a lady."

"Dog, thou liest!
I spring from loftier lineage than thine own."
He spake; and all at fiery speed the two
Shock'd on the central bridge, and either spear
Bent but not brake, and either knight at once,
Hurl'd as a stone from out of a catapult
Beyond the horse's crupper and the bridge,
Fell, as if dead; but quickly rose and drew,
And Gareth lash'd so fiercely with his brand
He drave his enemy backward down the bridge,
The damsel crying, "Well-stricken, kitchen-knave!"
Till Gareth's shield was cloven; but one stroke
Laid him that clove it grovelling on the ground.

Then cried the fallen, "Take not my life: I yield."
And Gareth, "So this damsel ask it of me
Good — I accord it easily as a grace."

She reddening, "Insolent scullion! I of thee?
I bound to thee for any favor ask'd!"
"Then shall he die." And Gareth there unlaced
His helmet as to slay him, but she shriek'd,
"Be not so hardy, scullion, as to slay
One nobler than thyself." "Damsel, thy charge
Is an abounding pleasure to me. Knight,
Thy life is thine at her command. Arise
And quickly pass to Arthur's hall, and say
His kitchen-knave hath sent thee. See thou crave
His pardon for thy breaking of his laws.
Myself when I return will plead for thee.
Thy shield is mine — farewell; and, damsel, thou,
Lead, and I follow."

And fast away she fled;
Then when he came upon her, spake: "Methought,
Knave, when I watch'd thee striking on the bridge,
The savor of thy kitchen came upon me
A little faintlier: but the wind hath changed;
I scent it twenty-fold." And then she sang,
"'O morning star' — not that tall felon there,
Whom thou, by sorcery or unhappiness
Or some device, hast foully overthrown, —
'O morning star that smilest in the blue,
O star, my morning dream hath proven true,
Smile sweetly, thou! my love hath smiled on me.'

"But thou begone, take counsel, and away,
For hard by here is one that guards a ford —
The second brother in their fool's parable —
Will pay thee all thy wages, and to boot.
Care not for shame: thou art not knight but knave."

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd, laughingly:
"Parables? Hear a parable of the knave.
When I was kitchen-knave among the rest,
Fierce was the hearth, and one of my co-mates
Own'd a rough dog, to whom he cast his coat,
'Guard it,' and there was none to meddle with it.
And such a coat art thou, and thee the King
Gave me to guard, and such a dog am I,
To worry, and not to flee; and — knight or knave —
The knave that doth thee service as full knight
Is all as good, meseems, as any knight
Toward thy sister's freeing."

"Ay, Sir Knave!
Ay, knave, because thou strikest as a knight,
Being but knave, I hate thee all the more."

"Fair damsel, you should worship me the more,
That, being but knave, I throw thine enemies."

"Ay, ay," she said, "but thou shalt meet thy match."

So when they touch'd the second river-loop,
Huge on a high red horse, and all in mail
Burnish'd to blinding, shone the Noonday Sun,
Beyond a raging shallow. As if the flower
That blows a globe of after arrowlets
Ten thousand-fold had grown, flash'd the fierce shield,
All sun; and Gareth's eyes had flying blots
Before them when he turn'd from watching him.
He from beyond the roaring shallow roar'd,
"What doest thou, brother, in my marches here?"
And she athwart the shallow shrill'd again,

"Here is a kitchen-knave from Arthur's hall
Hath overthrown thy brother, and hath his arms."
"Ugh!" cried the Sun, and, vizoring up a red
And cipher face of rounded foolishness,
Push'd horse across the foamings of the ford,
Whom Gareth met mid-stream; no room was there
For lance or tourney-skill; four strokes they struck
With sword, and these were mighty; the new knight
Had fear he might be shamed; but as the Sun
Heaved up a ponderous arm to strike the fifth,
The hoof of his horse slipt in the stream, the stream
Descended, and the Sun was wash'd away.

Then Gareth laid his lance athwart the ford;
So drew him home; but he that fought no more,
As being all bone-batter'd on the rock,
Yielded; and Gareth sent him to the King.
"Myself when I return will plead for thee.
Lead, and I follow." Quietly she led.
"Hath not the good wind, damsel, changed again?"
"Nay, not a point; nor art thou victor here.
There lies a ridge of slate across the ford;
His horse thereon stumbled — ay, for I saw it.

"'O sun' — not this strong fool whom thou, Sir Knave,
Hast overthrown thro' mere unhappiness —
'O sun, that wakenest all to bliss or pain,
O moon, that layest all to sleep again,
Shine sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.'

"What knowest thou of love-song or of love?
Nay, nay, God wot, so thou wert nobly born,
Thou hast a pleasant presence. Yea, perchance, —

"'O dewy flowers that open to the sun,
O dewy flowers that close when day is done,
Blow sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.'

"What knowest thou of flowers, except, belike,
To garnish meats with? hath not our good King
Who lent me thee, the flower of kitchendom,
A foolish love for flowers? what stick ye round
The pasty? wherewithal deck the boar's head?
Flowers? nay, the boar hath rosemaries and bay.

"'O birds that warble to the morning sky,
O birds that warble as the day goes by,
Sing sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.'

"What knowest thou of birds, lark, mavis, merle,
Linnet? what dream ye when they utter forth
May-music growing with the growing light,
Their sweet sun-worship? these be for the snare —
So runs thy fancy — these be for the spit,
Larding and basting. See thou have not now
Larded thy last, except thou turn and fly.
There stands the third fool of their allegory."

For there beyond a bridge of treble bow,
All in a rose-red from the west, and all
Naked it seem'd, and glowing in the broad
Deep-dimpled current underneath, the knight
That named himself the Star of Evening stood.

And Gareth, "Wherefore waits the madman there
Naked in open dayshine?" "Nay," she cried,
"Not naked, only wrapt in harden'd skins

That fit him like his own; and so ye cleave
His armor off him, these will turn the blade."

Then the third brother shouted o'er the bridge,
"O brother-star, why shine ye here so low?
Thy ward is higher up: but have ye slain
The damsel's champion?" and the damsel cried:

"No star of thine, but shot from Arthur's heaven
With all disaster unto thine and thee!
For both thy younger brethren have gone down
Before this youth; and so wilt thou, Sir Star;
Art thou not old?"

"Old, damsel, old and hard,
Old, with the might and breath of twenty boys."
Said Gareth, "Old, and over-bold in brag!
But that same strength which threw the Morning Star
Can throw the Evening."

Then that other blew
A hard and deadly note upon the horn.
"Approach and arm me!" With slow steps from out
An old storm-beaten, russet, many-stain'd
Pavilion, forth a grizzled damsel came,
And arm'd him in old arms, and brought a helm
With but a drying evergreen for crest,
And gave a shield whereon the star of even
Half-tarnish'd and half-bright, his emblem, shone.
But when it glitter'd o'er the saddle-bow,
They madly hurl'd together on the bridge;
And Gareth overthrew him, lighted, drew,
There met him drawn, and overthrew him again,
But up like fire he started: and as oft

As Gareth brought him grovelling on his knees,
So many a time he vaulted up again;
Till Gareth panted hard, and his great heart,
Foredooming all his trouble was in vain,
Labor'd within him, for he seem'd as one
That all in later, sadder age begins
To war against ill uses of a life,
But these from all his life arise, and cry,
"Thou hast made us lords, and canst not put us down!"
He half despairs; so Gareth seem'd to strike
Vainly, the damsel clamoring all the while,
"Well done, knave-knight, well stricken, O good knight-knave—
O knave, as noble as any of all the knights—
Shame me not, shame me not. I have prophesied—
Strike, thou art worthy of the Table Round—
His arms are old, he trusts the harden'd skin—
Strike—strike—the wind will never change again."
And Gareth hearing ever stronglier smote,
And hew'd great pieces of his armor off him,
But lash'd in vain against the harden'd skin,
And could not wholly bring him under, more
Than loud Southwesterns, rolling ridge on ridge,
The buoy that rides at sea, and dips and springs
For ever; till at length Sir Gareth's brand
Clash'd his, and brake it utterly to the hilt.
"I have thee now;" but forth that other sprang,
And, all unknightlike, writhed his wiry arms
Around him, till he felt, despite his mail,
Strangled, but straining even his uttermost
Cast, and so hurl'd him headlong o'er the bridge
Down to the river, sink or swim, and cried,
"Lead, and I follow."

But the damsel said:
"I lead no longer; ride thou at my side;
Thou art the kingliest of all kitchen-knaves.

"'O trefoil, sparkling on the rainy plain,
O rainbow with three colors after rain,
Shine sweetly: thrice my love hath smiled on me.'

"Sir, — and, good faith, I fain had added — Knight,
But that I heard thee call thyself a knave, —
Shamed am I that I so rebuked, reviled,
Missaid thee; noble I am; and thought the King
Scorn'd me and mine; and now thy pardon, friend,
For thou hast ever answer'd courteously,
And wholly bold thou art, and meek withal
As any of Arthur's best, but, being knave,
Hast mazed my wit: I marvel what thou art."

"Damsel," he said, "you be not all to blame,
Saving that you mistrusted our good King
Would handle scorn, or yield you, asking, one
Not fit to cope your quest. You said your say;
Mine answer was my deed. Good sooth! I hold
He scarce is knight, yea but half-man, nor meet
To fight for gentle damsel, he, who lets
His heart be stirr'd with any foolish heat
At any gentle damsel's waywardness.
Shamed? care not! thy foul sayings fought for me:
And seeing now thy words are fair, methinks
There rides no knight, not Lancelot, his great self,
Hath force to quell me."

Nigh upon that hour
When the lone hern forgets his melancholy,

Lets down his other leg, and stretching dreams
Of goodly supper in the distant pool,
Then turn'd the noble damsel smiling at him,
And told him of a cavern hard at hand,
Where bread and baken meats and good red wine
Of Southland, which the Lady Lyonors
Had sent her coming champion, waited him.

Anon they past a narrow comb wherein
Were slabs of rock with figures, knights on horse
Sculptured, and deckt in slowly-waning hues.
"Sir Knave, my knight, a hermit once was here,
Whose holy hand hath fashion'd on the rock
The war of Time against the soul of man,
And yon four fools have suck'd their allegory
From these damp walls, and taken but the form.
Know ye not these?" and Gareth lookt and read —
In letters like to those the vexillary
Hath left crag-carven o'er the streaming Gelt —
"PHOSPHORUS" then "MERIDIES," — "HESPERUS" —
"NOX" — "MORS," beneath five figures, armed men,
Slab after slab, their faces forward all,
And running down the Soul, a shape that fled
With broken wings, torn raiment, and loose hair,
For help and shelter to the hermit's cave.
"Follow the faces, and we find it. Look,
Who comes behind?"

For one — delay'd at first
Thro' helping back the dislocated Kay
To Camelot, then by what thereafter chanced,
The damsel's headlong error thro' the wood —
Sir Lancelot, having swum the river-loops —
His blue shield-lions cover'd — softly drew

Behind the twain, and when he saw the star
Gleam, on Sir Gareth's turning to him, cried,
"Stay, felon knight, I avenge me for my friend."
And Gareth crying prick'd against the cry;
But when they closed — in a moment — at one touch
Of that skill'd spear, the wonder of the world —
Went sliding down so easily, and fell,
That when he found the grass within his hands
He laugh'd; the laughter jarr'd upon Lynette:
Harshly she ask'd him, "Shamed and overthrown,
And tumbled back into the kitchen-knave,
Why laugh ye? that ye blew your boast in vain?"
"Nay, noble damsel, but that I, the son
Of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent,
And victor of the bridges and the ford,
And knight of Arthur, here lie thrown by whom
I know not, all thro' mere unhappiness —
Device and sorcery and unhappiness —
Out, sword; we are thrown!" And Lancelot answer'd:
"Prince,
O Gareth — thro' the mere unhappiness
Of one who came to help thee, not to harm,
Lancelot, and all as glad to find thee whole
As on the day when Arthur knighted him."

Then Gareth: "Thou — Lancelot! — thine the hand
That threw me? An some chance to mar the boast
Thy brethren of thee make — which could not chance —
Had sent thee down before a lesser spear,
Shamed had I been, and sad — O Lancelot — thou!"

Whereat the maiden, petulant: "Lancelot,
Why came ye not, when call'd? and wherefore now

Come ye, not call'd? I gloried in my knave,
Who being still rebuked would answer still
Courteous as any knight — but now, if knight,
The marvel dies, and leaves me fool'd and trick'd,
And only wondering wherefore played upon;
And doubtful whether I and mine be scorn'd.
Where should be truth if not in Arthur's hall,
In Arthur's presence? Knight, knave, prince and fool,
I hate thee and for ever."

And Lancelot said:
"Blessed be thou, Sir Gareth! knight art thou
To the King's best wish. O damsel, be you wise
To call him shamed who is but overthrown?
Thrown have I been, nor once, but many a time.
Victor from vanquish'd issues at the last,
And overthrower from being overthrown.
With sword we have not striven; and thy good horse
And thou are weary; yet not less I felt
Thy manhood thro' that wearied lance of thine.
Well hast thou done; for all the stream is freed,
And thou hast wreak'd his justice on his foes,
And when reviled hast answer'd graciously,
And makest merry when overthrown. Prince, knight,
Hail, knight and prince, and of our Table Round!"

And then when turning to Lynette he told
The tale of Gareth, petulantly she said:
"Ay, well — ay, well — for worse than being fool'd
Of others, is to fool one's self. A cave,
Sir Lancelot, is hard by, with meats and drinks
And forage for the horse, and flint for fire.
But all about it flies a honeysuckle.

Seek, till we find." And when they sought and found,
Sir Gareth drank and ate, and all his life
Past into sleep; on whom the maiden gazed:
"Sound sleep be thine! sound cause to sleep hast thou.
Wake lusty! Seem I not as tender to him
As any mother? Ay, but such a one
As all day long hath rated at her child,
And vext his day, but blesses him asleep —
Good lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle
In the hush'd night, as if the world were one
Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness!
O Lancelot, Lancelot," — and she clapt her hands —
"Full merry am I to find my goodly knave
Is knight and noble. See now, sworn have I,
Else yon black felon had not let me pass,
To bring thee back to do the battle with him.
Thus an thou goest, he will fight thee first;
Who doubts thee victor? so will my knight-knave
Miss the full flower of this accomplishment."

Said Lancelot: "Peradventure he you name
May know my shield. Let Gareth, an he will,
Change his for mine, and take my charger, fresh,
Not to be spurr'd, loving the battle as well
As he that rides him." "Lancelot like," she said,
"Courteous in this, Lord Lancelot, as in all."

And Gareth, wakening, fiercely clutch'd the shield:
"Ramp, ye lance-splintering lions, on whom all spears
Are rotten sticks! ye seem agape to roar!
Yea, ramp and roar at leaving of your lord! —
Care not, good beasts, so well I care for you.
O noble Lancelot, from my hold on these

Streams virtue — fire — thro' one that will not shame
Even the shadow of Lancelot under shield.
Hence: let us go."

Silent the silent field
They traversed. Arthur's Harp tho' summer-wan,
In counter motion to the clouds, allured
The glance of Gareth dreaming on his liege.
A star shot: "Lo," said Gareth, "the foe falls!"
An owl whoopt: "Hark the victor pealing there!"
Suddenly she that rode upon his left
Clung to the shield that Lancelot lent him, crying:
"Yield, yield him this again; 'tis he must fight:
I curse the tongue that all thro' yesterday
Reviled thee, and hath wrought on Lancelot now
To lend thee horse and shield: wonders ye have done;
Miracles ye cannot: here is glory enow
In having flung three: I see thee maim'd,
Mangled: I swear thou canst not fling the fourth."

"And wherefore, damsel? tell me all ye know.
You cannot scare me; nor rough face, or voice,
Brute bulk of limb, or boundless savagery
Appal me from the quest."

"Nay, prince," she cried,
"God wot, I never look'd upon the face,
Seeing he never rides abroad by day;
But watch'd him have I like a phantom pass
Chilling the night: nor have I heard the voice.
Always he made his mouthpiece of a page
Who came and went, and still reported him
As closing in himself the strength of ten,

And when his anger tare him, massacring
Man, woman, lad, and girl — yea, the soft babe!
Some hold that he hath swallow'd infant flesh,
Monster! O prince, I went for Lancelot first,
The quest is Lancelot's: give him back the shield."

Said Gareth laughing, "An he fight for this,
Belike he wins it as the better man:
Thus — and not else!"

But Lancelot on him urged
All the devisings of their chivalry
When one might meet a mightier than himself;
How best to manage horse, lance, sword, and shield,
And so fill up the gap where force might fail
With skill and fineness. Instant were his words.

Then Gareth: "Here be rules. I know but one —
To dash against mine enemy and to win.
Yet have I watch'd thee victor in the joust,
And seen thy way." "Heaven help thee!" sigh'd Lynette.

Then for a space, and under cloud that grew
To thunder-gloom palling all stars, they rode
In converse till she made her palfrey halt,
Lifted an arm, and softly whisper'd, "There."
And all the three were silent seeing, pitch'd
Beside the Castle Perilous on flat field,
A huge pavilion like a mountain peak
Sunder the glooming crimson on the marge,
Black, with black banner, and a long black horn
Beside it hanging; which Sir Gareth graspt,
And so, before the two could hinder him,

Sent all his heart and breath thro' all the horn.
Echo'd the walls, a light twinkled; anon
Came lights and lights, and once again he blew;
Whereon were hollow tramplings up and down
And muffled voices heard, and shadows past;
Till high above him, circled with her maids,
The Lady Lyonors at a window stood,
Beautiful among lights, and waving to him
White hands and courtesy; but when the prince
Three times had blown — after long hush — at last —
The huge pavilion slowly yielded up,
Thro' those black foldings, that which housed therein.
High on a night-black horse, in night-black arms,
With white breast-bone, and barren ribs of Death,
And crown'd with fleshless laughter — some ten steps —
In the half-light — thro' the dim dawn — advanced
The monster, and then paused, and spake no word.

But Gareth spake and all indignantly:
"Fool, for thou hast, men say, the strength of ten,
Canst thou not trust the limbs thy God hath given,
But must, to make the terror of thee more,
Trick thyself out in ghastly imageries
Of that which Life hath done with, and the clod,
Less dull than thou, will hide with mantling flowers
As if for pity?" But he spake no word;
Which set the horror higher: a maiden swoon'd;
The Lady Lyonors wrung her hands and wept,
As doom'd to be the bride of Night and Death;
Sir Gareth's head prickled beneath his helm;
And even Sir Lancelot thro' his warm blood felt
Ice strike, and all that mark'd him were aghast.

At once Sir Lancelot's charger fiercely neigh'd,
And Death's dark war-horse bounded forward with him.
Then those that did not blink the terror saw
That Death was cast to ground, and slowly rose.
But with one stroke Sir Gareth split the skull.
Half fell to right and half to left and lay.
Then with a stronger buffet he clove the helm
As throughly as the skull; and out from this
Issued the bright face of a blooming boy
Fresh as a flower new-born, and crying, "Knight,
Slay me not: my three brethren bade me do it,
To make a horror all about the house,
And stay the world from Lady Lyonors;
They never dream'd the passes would be past."
Answer'd Sir Gareth graciously to one
Not many a moon his younger, "My fair child,
What madness made thee challenge the chief knight
Of Arthur's hall?" "Fair Sir, they bade me do it.
They hate the King and Lancelot, the King's friend;
They hoped to slay him somewhere on the stream,
They never dream'd the passes could be past."

Then sprang the happier day from underground;
And Lady Lyonors and her house, with dance
And revel and song, made merry over Death,
As being after all their foolish fears
And horrors only proven a blooming boy.
So large mirth lived, and Gareth won the quest.

And he that told the tale in older times
Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,
But he that told it later says Lynette.

LANCELOT AND ELAINE

Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable,
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,
High in her chamber up a tower to the east
Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot;
Which first she placed where morning's earliest ray
Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam;
Then fearing rust or soilure fashion'd for it
A case of silk, and braided thereupon
All the devices blazon'd on the shield
In their own tinct, and added, of her wit,
A border fantasy of branch and flower,
And yellow-throated nestling in her nest.
Nor rested thus content, but day by day,
Leaving her household and good father, climb'd
That eastern tower, and entering barr'd her door,
Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,
Now guess'd a hidden meaning in his arms,
Now made a pretty history to herself
Of every dint a sword had beaten in it,
And every scratch a lance had made upon it,
Conjecturing when and where: this cut is fresh;
That ten years back; this dealt him at Caerlyle;
That at Caerleon; this at Camelot:
And ah, God's mercy, what a stroke was there!
And here a thrust that might have kill'd, but God
Broke the strong lance, and roll'd his enemy down,
And saved him: so she lived in fantasy.

How came the lily maid by that good shield
Of Lancelot, she that knew not even his name?
He left it with her, when he rode to tilt
For the great diamond in the diamond jousts,
Which Arthur had ordain'd, and by that name
Had named them, since a diamond was the prize.

For Arthur, long before they crown'd him king,
Roving the trackless realms of Lyonnesse,
Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn.
A horror lived about the tarn, and clave
Like its own mists to all the mountain side:
For here two brothers, one a king, had met
And fought together; but their names were lost;
And each had slain his brother at a blow;
And down they fell and made the glen abhorr'd:
And there they lay till all their bones were bleach'd,
And lichen'd into color with the crags:
And he that once was king had on a crown
Of diamonds, one in front and four aside.
And Arthur came, and laboring up the pass,
All in a misty moonshine, unawares
Had trodden that crown'd skeleton, and the skull
Brake from the nape, and from the skull the crown
Roll'd into light, and turning on its rims
Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn:
And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught,
And set it on his head, and in his heart
Heard murmurs, "Lo, thou likewise shalt be king."

Thereafter, when a king, he had the gems
Pluck'd from the crown, and show'd them to his knights,
Saying: "These jewels, whereupon I chanced

Divinely, are the kingdom's, not the King's —
For public use: henceforward let there be,
Once every year, a joust for one of these:
For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn
Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow
In use of arms and manhood, till we drive
The heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land
Hereafter, which God hinder!" Thus he spoke:
And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and still
Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,
With purpose to present them to the Queen
When all were won; but, meaning all at once
To snare her royal fancy with a boon
Worth half her realm, had never spoken word.

Now for the central diamond and the last
And largest, Arthur, holding then his court
Hard on the river nigh the place which now
Is this world's hugest, let proclaim a joust
At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh
Spake — for she had been sick — to Guinevere:
"Are you so sick, my Queen, you cannot move
To these fair jousts?" "Yea, lord," she said, "ye know it."
"Then will ye miss," he answer'd, "the great deeds
Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,
A sight ye love to look on." And the Queen
Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly
On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King.
He, thinking that he read her meaning there,
"Stay with me, I am sick; my love is more
Than many diamonds," yielded; and a heart
Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen —
However much he yearn'd to make complete

The tale of diamonds for his destined boon—
Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,
"Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,
And lets me from the saddle;" and the King
Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way.
No sooner gone than suddenly she began:

"To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame!
Why go ye not to these fair jousts? the knights
Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd
Will murmur, 'Lo the shameless ones, who take
Their pastime now the trustful King is gone!'"
Then Lancelot, vext at having lied in vain:
"Are ye so wise? ye were not once so wise,
My Queen, that summer when ye loved me first.
Then of the crowd ye took no more account
Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,
When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,
And every voice is nothing. As to knights,
Them surely can I silence with all ease.
But now my loyal worship is allow'd
Of all men: many a bard, without offence,
Has link'd our names together in his lay,
Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,
The pearl of beauty; and our knights at feast
Have pledged us in this union, while the King
Would listen smiling. How then? is there more?
Has Arthur spoken aught? or would yourself,
Now weary of my service and devoir,
Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord?"

She broke into a little scornful laugh:
"Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,

That passionate perfection, my good lord —
But who can gaze upon the sun in heaven?
He never spake word of reproach to me,
He never had a glimpse of mine untruth,
He cares not for me: only here to-day
There gleamed a vague suspicion in his eyes:
Some meddling rogue has tamper'd with him — else
Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,
And swearing men to vows impossible,
To make them like himself; but, friend, to me
He is all fault who hath no fault at all:
For who loves me must have a touch of earth;
The low sun makes the color: I am yours,
Nor Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond.
And therefore hear my words: go to the jousts:
The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream
When sweetest; and the vermin voices here
May buzz so loud — we scorn them, but they sting."

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights:
"And with what face, after my pretext made,
Shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot, I
Before a king who honors his own word
As if it were his God's?"

"Yea," said the Queen,
"A moral child without the craft to rule,
Else had he not lost me: but listen to me,
If I must find you wit: we hear it said
That men go down before your spear at a touch,
But knowing you are Lancelot; your great name,
This conquers: hide it therefore; go unknown:
Win! by this kiss you will: and our true King

Will then allow your pretext, O my knight,
As all for glory; for to speak him true,
Ye know right well, how meek soe'er he seem,
No keener hunter after glory breathes.
He loves it in his knights more than himself;
They prove to him his work: win and return."

Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,
Wroth at himself. Not willing to be known,
He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare,
Chose the green path that show'd the rarer foot,
And there among the solitary downs,
Full often lost in fancy, lost his way;
Till as he traced a faintly-shadow'd track,
That all in loops and links among the dales
Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw
Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers.
Thither he made, and blew the gateway horn.
Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man,
Who let him into lodging and disarm'd.
And Lancelot marvell'd at the wordless man;
And issuing found the Lord of Astolat
With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,
Moving to meet him in the castle court;
And close behind them stept the lily maid
Elaine, his daughter: mother of the house
There was not. Some light jest among them rose
With laughter dying down as the great knight
Approach'd them; then the Lord of Astolat:
"Whence comest thou my guest, and by what name
Livest between the lips? for by thy state
And presence I might guess thee chief of those,
After the King, who eat in Arthur's halls.

Him have I seen: the rest, his Table Round,
Known as they are, to me they are unknown."

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights:
"Known am I, and of Arthur's hall, and known,
What I by mere mischance have brought, my shield.
But since I go to joust as one unknown
At Camelot for the diamond, ask me not;
Hereafter ye shall know me — and the shield —
I pray you lend me one, if such you have,
Blank, or at least with some device not mine."

Then said the Lord of Astolat: "Here is Torre's:
Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre;
And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough.
His ye can have." Then added plain Sir Torre,
"Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it."
Here laugh'd the father saying: "Fie, Sir Churl,
Is that an answer for a noble knight?
Allow him! but Lavaine, my younger here,
He is so full of lustihood, he will ride,
Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour,
And set it in this damsel's golden hair,
To make her thrice as wilful as before."

"Nay, father, nay, good father, shame me not
Before this noble knight," said young Lavaine,
"For nothing. Surely I but play'd on Torre:
He seem'd so sullen, vext he could not go:
A jest, no more! for, knight, the maiden dreamt
That some one put this diamond in her hand,
And that it was too slippery to be held,
And slipt and fell into some pool or stream,

The castle-well, belike; and then I said
That *if* I went and *if* I fought and won it —
But all was jest and joke among ourselves —
Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest.
But, father, give me leave, and if he will,
To ride to Camelot with this noble knight:
Win shall I not, but do my best to win;
Young as I am, yet would I do my best."

"So ye will grace me," answer'd Lancelot,
Smiling a moment, "with your fellowship
O'er these waste downs whereon I lost myself,
Then were I glad of you as guide and friend:
And you shall win this diamond, — as I hear,
It is a fair large diamond, — if ye may,
And yield it to this maiden, if ye will."
"A fair large diamond," added plain Sir Torre,
"Such be for queens, and not for simple maids."
Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,
Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,
Flush'd slightly at the slight disparagement
Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her,
Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus return'd:
"If what is fair be but for what is fair,
And only queens are to be counted so,
Rash were my judgment then, who deem this maid
Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,
Not violating the bond of like to like."

He spoke and ceased: the lily maid Elaine,
Won by the mellow voice before she look'd,
Lifted her eyes and read his lineaments.
The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,

In battle with the love he bare his lord,
Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his time.
Another sinning on such heights with one,
The flower of all the west and all the world,
Had been the sleeker for it; but in him
His mood was often like a fiend, and rose
And drove him into wastes and solitudes
For agony, who was yet a living soul.
Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man
That ever among ladies ate in hall,
And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes.
However marr'd, of more than twice her years,
Seam'd with an ancient sword-cut on the cheek,
And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes
And loved him, with that love which was her doom.

Then the great knight, the darling of the court,
Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall
Stept with all grace, and not with half disdain
Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,
But kindly man moving among his kind:
Whom they with meats and vintage of their best
And talk and minstrel melody entertain'd.
And much they ask'd of court and Table Round
And ever well and readily answer'd he;
But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere,
Suddenly speaking of the wordless man,
Heard from the baron that, ten years before,
The heathen caught and reft him of his tongue.
"He learnt and warn'd me of their fierce design
Against my house, and him they caught and maim'd;
But I, my sons, and little daughter fled
From bonds or death, and dwelt among the woods

By the great river in a boatman's hut.
Dull days were those, till our good Arthur broke
The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill."

"O there, great lord, doubtless," Lavaine said, rapt
By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth
Toward greatness in its elder, "you have fought.
O tell us — for we live apart — you know
Of Arthur's glorious wars." And Lancelot spoke
And answer'd him at full, as having been
With Arthur in the fight which all day long
Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem;
And in the four loud battles by the shore
Of Duglas; that on Bassa; then the war
That thunder'd in and out the gloomy skirts
Of Celidon the forest; and again
By Castle Gurnion, where the glorious King
Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,
Carved of one emerald centred in a sun
Of silver rays, that lighten'd as he breathed;
And at Caerleon had he helped his lord,
When the strong neighings of the wild white Horse
Set every gilded parapet shuddering;
And up in Agned-Cathregonion too,
And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit,
Where many a heathen fell; "and on the mount
Of Badon I myself beheld the King
Charge at the head of all his Table Round,
And all his legion crying Christ and him,
And brake them; and I saw him, after, stand
High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume
Red as the rising sun with heathen blood,
And seeing me, with a great voice he cried,

'They are broken, they are broken!' for the King,
However mild he seems at home, nor cares
For triumph in our mimic wars, the jousts—
For if his own knight cast him down, he laughs,
Saying his knights are better men than he—
Yet in this heathen war the fire of God
Fills him: I never saw his like; there lives
No greater leader."

While he utter'd this,
Low to her own heart said the lily maid,
"Save your great self, fair lord;" and when he fell
From talk of war to traits of pleasantry—
Being mirthful he, but in a stately kind—
She still took note that when the living smile
Died from his lips, across him came a cloud
Of melancholy severe, from which again,
Whenever in her hovering to and fro
The lily maid had striven to make him cheer,
There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness
Of manners and of nature: and she thought
That all was nature, all, perchance, for her.
And all night long his face before her lived,
As when a painter, poring on a face,
Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man
Behind it, and so paints him that his face,
The shape and color of a mind and life,
Lives for his children, ever at its best
And fullest; so the face before her lived,
Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full
Of noble things, and held her from her sleep,
Till rathe she rose, half-cheated in the thought
She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine.

First as in fear, step after step, she stole
Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating:
Anon, she heard Sir Lancelot cry in the court,
"This shield, my friend, where is it?" and Lavaine
Past inward, as she came from out the tower.
There to his proud horse Lancelot turn'd, and smooth'd
The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.
Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew
Nearer and stood. He look'd, and, more amazed
Than if seven men had set upon him, saw
The maiden standing in the dewy light.
He had not dream'd she was so beautiful.
Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,
For silent, tho' he greeted her, she stood
Rapt on his face as if it were a god's.
Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire
That he should wear her favor at the tilt.
She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.
"Fair lord, whose name I know not — noble it is
I well believe, the noblest — will you wear
My favor at this tourney?" "Nay," said he,
"Fair lady, since I never yet have worn
Favor of any lady in the lists.
Such is my wont, as those who know me know."
"Yea, so," she answer'd; "then in wearing mine
Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,
That those who know should know you." And he turn'd
Her counsel up and down within his mind,
And found it true, and answer'd: "True, my child.
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:
What is it?" and she told him, "A red sleeve
Broider'd with pearls," and brought it: then he bound
Her token on his helmet, with a smile

Saying, "I never yet have done so much
For any maiden living," and the blood
Sprang to her face and fill'd her with delight;
But left her all the paler when Lavaine
Returning brought the yet-unblazon'd shield,
His brother's; which he gave to Lancelot,
Who parted with his own to fair Elaine:
"Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield
In keeping till I come." "A grace to me,"
She answer'd, "twice to-day. I am your squire!"
Whereat Lavaine said laughingly: "Lily maid,
For fear our people call you lily maid
In earnest, let me bring your color back;
Once, twice, and thrice: now get you hence to bed:"
So kiss'd her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,
And thus they moved away: she stay'd a minute,
Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there —
Her bright hair blown about the serious face
Yet rosy kindled with her brother's kiss —
Paused by the gateway, standing near the shield
In silence, while she watch'd their arms far-off
Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs.
Then to her tower she climb'd, and took the shield,
There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

Meanwhile the new companions past away
Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs,
To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight
Not far from Camelot, now for forty years
A hermit, who had pray'd, labor'd and pray'd,
And ever laboring had scoop'd himself
In the white rock a chapel and a hall
On massive columns, like a shore-cliff cave,

And cells and chambers: all were fair and dry;
The green light from the meadows underneath
Struck up and lived along the milky roofs;
And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees
And poplars made a noise of falling showers.
And thither wending there that night they bode.

But when the next day broke from underground,
And shot red fire and shadows thro' the cave,
They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away.
Then Lancelot saying, "Hear, but hold my name
Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake,"
Abash'd Lavaine, whose instant reverence,
Dearer to true young hearts than their own praise,
But left him leave to stammer, "Is it indeed?"
And after muttering, "The great Lancelot,"
At last he got his breath and answer'd: "One,
One have I seen — that other, our liege lord,
The dread Pendragon, Britain's King of kings,
Of whom the people talk mysteriously,
He will be there — then were I stricken blind
That minute, I might say that I had seen."

So spake Lavaine, and when they reached the lists
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes
Run thro' the peopled gallery which half round
Lay like a rainbow fallen upon the grass,
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat
Robed in red samite, easily to be known,
Since to his crown the golden dragon clung,
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,
And from the carven-work behind him crept
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make

Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them
Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable
Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found
The new design wherein they lost themselves,
Yet with all ease, so tender was the work:
And, in the costly canopy o'er him set,
Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king.

Then Lancelot answer'd young Lavaine and said:
"Me you call great: mine is the firmer seat,
The truer lance: but there is many a youth
Now crescent, who will come to all I am
And overcome it; and in me there dwells
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch
Of greatness to know well I am not great:
There is the man." And Lavaine gaped upon him
As on a thing miraculous, and anon
The trumpets blew; and then did either side,
They that assail'd, and they that held the lists,
Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move,
Meet in the midst, and there so furiously
Shock that a man far-off might well perceive,
If any man that day were left afield,
The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms.
And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw
Which were the weaker; then he hurl'd into it
Against the stronger: little need to speak
Of Lancelot in his glory! King, duke, earl,
Count, baron — whom he smote, he overthrew.

But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin,
Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists,
Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight

Should do and almost overdo the deeds
Of Lancelot; and one said to the other, "Lo!
What is he? I do not mean the force alone —
The grace and versatility of the man!
Is it not Lancelot?" "When has Lancelot worn
Favor of any lady in the lists?
Not such his wont, as we that know him know."
"How then? who then?" a fury seized them all,
A fiery family passion for the name
Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.
They couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds, and thus,
Their plumes driven backward by the wind they made
In moving, all together down upon him
Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North Sea,
Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all
Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,
Down on a bark, and overbears the bark
And him that helms it; so they overbore
Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear
Down-glancing lamed the charger, and a spear
Prick'd sharply his own cuirass, and the head
Pierced thro' his side, and there snapt and remain'd.

Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully:
He bore a knight of old repute to the earth,
And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay.
He up the side, sweating with agony, got,
But thought to do while he might yet endure,
And being lustily holpen by the rest,
His party, — tho' it seem'd half-miracle
To those he fought with, — drave his kith and kin,
And all the Table Round that held the lists,
Back to the barrier; then the trumpets blew

Proclaiming his the prize who wore the sleeve
Of scarlet and the pearls; and all the knights,
His party, cried, "Advance and take thy prize
The diamond;" but he answer'd: "Diamond me
No diamonds! for God's love, a little air!
Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death!
Hence will I, and I charge you, follow me not."

He spoke, and vanish'd suddenly from the field
With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.
There from his charger down he slid, and sat,
Gasping to Sir Lavaine, "Draw the lance-head."
"Ah, my sweet lord Sir Lancelot," said Lavaine,
"I dread me, if I draw it, you will die."
But he, "I die already with it: draw —
Draw," — and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave
A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,
And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank
For the pure pain, and wholly swoon'd away.
Then came the hermit out and bare him in,
There stanch'd his wound; and there, in daily doubt
Whether to live or die, for many a week
Hid from the wild world's rumor by the grove
Of poplars with their noise of falling showers,
And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay.

But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists,
His party, knights of utmost North and West,
Lords of waste marshes, kings of desolate isles,
Came round their great Pendragon, saying to him,
"Lo, Sire, our knight, thro' whom we won the day,
Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize
Untaken, crying that his prize is death."

"Heaven hinder," said the King, "that such an one,
So great a knight as we have seen to-day —
He seem'd to me another Lancelot —
Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot —
He must not pass uncared for. Wherefore rise,
O Gawain, and ride forth and find the knight.
Wounded and wearied, needs must he be near.
I charge you that you get at once to horse.
And, knights and kings, there breathes not one of you
Will deem this prize of ours is rashly given:
His prowess was too wondrous. We will do him
No customary honor: since the knight
Came not to us, of us to claim the prize,
Ourselves will send it after. Rise and take
This diamond, and deliver it, and return,
And bring us where he is, and how he fares,
And cease not from your quest until ye find."

So saying, from the carven flower above,
To which it made a restless heart, he took
And gave the diamond: then from where he sat
At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose,
With smiling face and frowning heart, a prince
In the mid might and flourish of his May,
Gawain, surnamed the Courteous, fair and strong,
And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint,
And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal
Sir Modred's brother, and the child of Lot,
Nor often loyal to his word, and now
Wroth that the King's command to sally forth
In quest of whom he knew not, made him leave
The banquet and concourse of knights and kings.

So all in wrath he got to horse and went;
While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,
Past, thinking, "Is it Lancelot who hath come
Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain
Of glory, and hath added wound to wound,
And ridden away to die?" So fear'd the King,
And, after two days' tarriance there, return'd.
Then when he saw the Queen, embracing ask'd,
"Love, are you yet so sick?" "Nay, lord," she said.
"And where is Lancelot?" Then the Queen amazed,
"Was he not with you? won he not your prize?"
"Nay, but one like him." "Why, that like was he."
And when the King demanded how she knew,
Said: "Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us
Than Lancelot told me of a common talk
That men went down before his spear at a touch,
But knowing he was Lancelot; his great name
Conquer'd; and therefore would he hide his name
From all men, even the King, and to this end
Had made the pretext of a hindering wound,
That he might joust unknown of all, and learn
If his old prowess were in aught decay'd;
And added, 'Our true Arthur, when he learns,
Will well allow my pretext, as for gain
Of purer glory.'"

Then replied the King:
"Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,
In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,
To have trusted me as he hath trusted thee.
Surely his King and most familiar friend
Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed,

Albeit I know my knights fantastical,
So fine a fear in our large Lancelot
Must needs have moved my laughter: now remains
But little cause for laughter: his own kin—
Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him, this!
His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him;
So that he went sore wounded from the field.
Yet good news too; for goodly hopes are mine
That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart.
He wore, against his wont, upon his helm
A sleeve of scarlet, broider'd with great pearls,
Some gentle maiden's gift."

"Yea, lord," she said,
"Thy hopes are mine," and saying that, she choked,
And sharply turn'd about to hide her face,
Past to her chamber and there flung herself
Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it,
And clench'd her fingers till they bit the palm,
And shriek'd out "Traitor!" to the unhearing wall,
Then flash'd into wild tears, and rose again,
And moved about her palace, proud and pale.

Gawain the while thro' all the region round
Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest,
Touch'd at all points except the poplar grove,
And came at last, tho' late, to Astolat;
Whom glittering in enamell'd arms the maid
Glanced at, and cried, "What news from Camelot, lord?
What of the knight with the red sleeve?" "He won."
"I knew it," she said. "But parted from the jousts
Hurt in the side;" whereat she caught her breath;
Thro' her own side she felt the sharp lance go;

Thereon she smote her hand; wellnigh she swoon'd:
And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came
The Lord of Astolat out, to whom the prince
Reported who he was, and on what quest
Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find
The victor, but had ridden at random round
To seek him, and had wearied of the search.
To whom the Lord of Astolat: "Bide with us,
And ride no more at random, noble prince!
Here was the knight and here he left a shield;
This will he send or come for: furthermore,
Our son is with him; we shall hear anon,
Needs must we hear." To this the courteous prince
Accorded with his wonted courtesy,
Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it,
And stay'd; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine;
Where could be found face daintier? then her shape
From forehead down to foot, perfect — again
From foot to forehead exquisitely turn'd:
"Well — if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!"
And oft they met among the garden yews,
And there he set himself to play upon her
With sallying wit, free flashes from a height
Above her, graces of the court, and songs,
Sighs, and low smiles, and golden eloquence
And amorous adulation, till the maid
Rebell'd against it, saying to him: "Prince,
O loyal nephew of our noble King,
Why ask you not to see the shield he left,
Whence you might learn his name? Why slight your King,
And lose the quest he sent you on, and prove
No surer than our falcon yesterday,
Who lost the hern we slipt her at, and went

To all the winds?" "Nay, by mine head," said he,
"I lose it, as we lose the lark in heaven,
O damsel, in the light of your blue eyes;
But an ye will it let me see the shield."
And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw
Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold,
Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mock'd:
"Right was the King! our Lancelot! that true man!"
"And right was I," she answer'd merrily, "I,
Who dream'd my knight the greatest knight of all."
"And if *I* dream'd," said Gawain, "that you love
This greatest knight, your pardon! lo, ye know it!
Speak therefore: shall I waste myself in vain?"
Full simple was her answer: "What know I?
My brethren have been all my fellowship;
And I, when often they have talk'd of love,
Wish'd it had been my mother, for they talk'd,
Meseem'd, of what they knew not; so myself —
I know not if I know what true love is,
But if I know, then, if I love not him,
I know there is none other I can love."
"Yea, by God's death," said he, "ye love him well,
But would not, knew ye what all others know,
And whom he loves." "So be it," cried Elaine,
And lifted her fair face and moved away:
But he pursued her, calling, "Stay a little!
One golden minute's grace! he wore your sleeve:
Would he break faith with one I may not name?
Must our true man change like a leaf at last?
Nay — like enow: why then, far be it from me
To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves!
And, damsel, for I deem you know full well
Where your great knight is hidden, let me leave

My quest with you; the diamond also: here!
For if you love, it will be sweet to give it;
And if he love, it will be sweet to have it
From your own hand; and whether he love or not,
A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well
A thousand times! — a thousand times farewell!
Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two
May meet at court hereafter: there, I think,
So ye will learn the courtesies of the court,
We two shall know each other."

Then he gave,
And slightly kiss'd the hand to which he gave,
The diamond, and all wearied of the quest
Leapt on his horse, and carolling as he went
A true-love ballad, lightly rode away.

Thence to the court he past; there told the King
What the King knew, "Sir Lancelot is the knight."
And added, "Sire, my liege, so much I learnt;
But fail'd to find him tho' I rode all round
The region: but I lighted on the maid
Whose sleeve he wore; she loves him; and to her,
Deeming our courtesy is the truest law,
I gave the diamond: she will render it;
For by mine head she knows his hiding-place."

The seldom-frowning King frown'd, and replied,
"Too courteous truly! ye shall go no more
On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget
Obedience is the courtesy due to kings."

He spake and parted. Wroth, but all in awe,
For twenty strokes of the blood, without a word,

Linger'd that other, staring after him;
Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzz'd abroad
About the maid of Astolat, and her love.
All ears were prick'd at once, all tongues were loosed:
"The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot,
Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat."
Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all
Had marvel what the maid might be, but most
Predoom'd her as unworthy. One old dame
Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news.
She, that had heard the noise of it before,
But sorrowing Lancelot should have stoop'd so low,
Marr'd her friend's aim with pale tranquillity.
So ran the tale like fire about the court,
Fire in dry stubble a nine-days' wonder flared:
Till even the knights at banquet twice or thrice
Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen,
And pledging Lancelot and the lily maid
Smiled at each other, while the Queen, who sat
With lips severely placid, felt the knot
Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen
Crush'd the wild passion out against the floor
Beneath the banquet, where the meats became
As wormwood, and she hated all who pledged.

But far away the maid in Astolat,
Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept
The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart,
Crept to her father, while he mused alone,
Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said:
"Father, you call me wilful, and the fault
Is yours who let me have my will, and now,
Sweet father, will you let me lose my wits?"

"Nay," said he, "surely." "Wherefore, let me hence,"
She answer'd, "and find out our dear Lavaine."
"Ye will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine:
Bide," answer'd he: "we needs must hear anon
Of him, and of that other." "Ay," she said,
"And of that other, for I needs must hence
And find that other, whereso'er he be,
And with mine own hand give his diamond to him,
Lest I be found as faithless in the quest
As yon proud prince who left the quest to me.
Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
Death-pale, for the lack of gentle maiden's aid.
The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound,
My father, to be sweet and serviceable
To noble knights in sickness, as ye know,
When these have worn their tokens: let me hence,
I pray you." Then her father nodding said:
"Ay, ay, the diamond: wit ye well, my child,
Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,
Being our greatest: yea, and you must give it —
And sure I think this fruit is hung too high
For any mouth to gape for save a queen's —
Nay, I mean nothing: so then, get you gone,
Being so very wilful you must go."

Lightly, her suit allow'd, she slipt away,
And while she made her ready for her ride,
Her father's latest word humm'd in her ear,
"Being so very wilful you must go,"
And changed itself and echo'd in her heart,
"Being so very wilful you must die."
But she was happy enough and shook it off,

As we shake off the bee that buzzes at us;
And in her heart she answer'd it and said,
"What matter, so I help him back to life?"
Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide
Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs
To Camelot, and before the city-gates
Came on her brother with a happy face
Making a roan horse caper and curvet
For pleasure all about a field of flowers;
Whom when she saw, "Lavaine," she cried, "Lavaine,
How fares my lord Sir Lancelot?" He amazed,
"Torre and Elaine! why here? Sir Lancelot!
How know ye my lord's name is Lancelot?"
But when the maid had told him all her tale,
Then turn'd Sir Torre, and being in his moods
Left them, and under the strange-statued gate,
Where Arthur's wars were render'd mystically,
Past up the still rich city to his kin,
His own far blood, which dwelt at Camelot;
And her, Lavaine across the poplar grove
Led to the caves: there first she saw the casque
Of Lancelot on the wall: her scarlet sleeve,
Tho' carved and cut, and half the pearls away,
Stream'd from it still; and in her heart she laugh'd,
Because he had not loosed it from his helm,
But meant once more perchance to tourney in it.
And when they gain'd the cell wherein he slept,
His battle-writhen arms and mighty hands
Lay naked on the wolf-skin, and a dream
Of dragging down his enemy made them move.
Then she that saw him lying unsleek, unshorn,
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
Utter'd a little tender dolorous cry.

The sound not wonted in a place so still
Woke the sick knight, and while he roll'd his eyes
Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying,
"Your prize the diamond sent you by the King."
His eyes glisten'd: she fancied, "Is it for me?"
And when the maid had told him all the tale
Of king and prince, the diamond sent, the quest
Assign'd to her not worthy of it, she knelt
Full lowly by the corners of his bed,
And laid the diamond in his open hand.
Her face was near, and as we kiss the child
That does the task assign'd, he kiss'd her face.
At once she slipt like water to the floor.
"Alas," he said, "your ride hath wearied you.
Rest must you have." "No rest for me," she said;
"Nay, for near you, fair lord, I am at rest."
What might she mean by that? his large black eyes,
Yet larger thro' his leanness, dwelt upon her,
Till all her heart's sad secret blazed itself
In the heart's colors on her simple face;
And Lancelot look'd and was perplext in mind,
And being weak in body said no more,
But did not love the color; woman's love,
Save one, he not regarded, and so turn'd
Sighing, and feign'd a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided thro' the fields,
And past beneath the weirdly-sculptured gates
Far up the dim rich city to her kin;
There bode the night: but woke with dawn, and past
Down thro' the dim rich city to the fields,
Thence to the cave. So day by day she past
In either twilight ghost-like to and fro

Gliding, and every day she tended him,
And likewise many a night; and Lancelot
Would, tho' he call'd his wound a little hurt
Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times
Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem
Uncourteous, even he: but the meek maid
Sweetly forbore him ever, being to him
Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,
Milder than any mother to a sick child,
And never woman yet, since man's first fall,
Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love
Upbore her; till the hermit, skill'd in all
The simples and the science of that time,
Told him that her fine care had saved his life.
And the sick man forgot her simple blush,
Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine,
Would listen for her coming and regret
Her parting step, and held her tenderly,
And loved her with all love except the love
Of man and woman when they love their best,
Closest and sweetest, and had died the death
In any knightly fashion for her sake.
And peradventure had he seen her first
She might have made this and that other world
Another world for the sick man; but now
The shackles of an old love straiten'd him,
His honor rooted in dishonor stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made
Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.
These, as but born of sickness, could not live;
For when the blood ran lustier in him again,

Full often the bright image of one face,
Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,
Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.
Then if the maiden, while that ghostly grace
Beam'd on his fancy, spoke, he answer'd not,
Or short and coldly, and she knew right well
What the rough sickness meant, but what this meant
She knew not, and the sorrow dimm'd her sight,
And drave her ere her time across the fields
Far into the rich city, where alone
She murmur'd, "Vain, in vain: it cannot be.
He will not love me: how then? must I die?"
Then as a little helpless innocent bird,
That has but one plain passage of few notes,
Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er
For all an April morning, till the ear
Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid
Went half the night repeating, "Must I die?"
And now to right she turn'd, and now to left,
And found no ease in turning or in rest;
And "Him or death," she mutter'd, "death or him,"
Again and like a burthen, "Him or death."

But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,
To Astolat returning rode the three.
There morn by morn, arraying her sweet self
In that wherein she deem'd she look'd her best,
She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought,
"If I be loved, these are my festal robes,
If not, the victim's flowers before he fall."
And Lancelot ever prest upon the maid
That she should ask some goodly gift of him
For her own self or hers: "and do not shun

To speak the wish most near to your true heart;
Such service have ye done me that I make
My will of yours, and prince and lord am I
In mine own land, and what I will I can."
Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,
But like a ghost without the power to speak.
And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish,
And bode among them yet a little space
Till he should learn it; and one morn it chanced
He found her in among the garden yews,
And said, "Delay no longer, speak your wish,
Seeing I go to-day:" then out she brake:
"Going? and we shall never see you more.
And I must die for want of one bold word."
"Speak: that I live to hear," he said, "is yours."
Then suddenly and passionately she spoke:
"I have gone mad. I love you: let me die."
"Ah, sister," answer'd Lancelot, "what is this?"
And innocently extending her white arms,
"Your love," she said, "your love — to be your wife."
And Lancelot answer'd, "Had I chosen to wed,
I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine;
But now there never will be wife of mine."
"No, no," she cried, "I care not to be wife,
But to be with you still, to see your face,
To serve you, and to follow you thro' the world."
And Lancelot answer'd: "Nay, the world, the world,
All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart
To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue
To blare its own interpretation — nay,
Full ill then should I quit your brother's love,
And your good father's kindness." And she said,
"Not to be with you, not to see your face —

Alas for me then, my good days are done!"
"Nay, noble maid," he answer'd, "ten times nay!
This is not love, but love's first flash in youth,
Most common: yea, I know it of mine own self;
And you yourself will smile at your own self
Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life
To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age:
And then will I, for true you are and sweet
Beyond mine old belief in womanhood,
More specially should your good knight be poor,
Endow you with broad land and territory
Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,
So that would make you happy: furthermore,
Even to the death, as tho' ye were my blood,
In all your quarrels will I be your knight.
This will I do, dear damsel, for your sake,
And more than this I cannot."

While he spoke
She neither blush'd nor shook, but deathly-pale
Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied,
"Of all this will I nothing;" and so fell,
And thus they bore her swooning to her tower.

Then spake, to whom thro' those black walls of yew
Their talk had pierced, her father: "Ay, a flash,
I fear me, that will strike my blossom dead.
Too courteous are ye, fair Lord Lancelot.
I pray you, use some rough discourtesy
To blunt or break her passion."

Lancelot said,
"That were against me: what I can I will;"

And there that day remain'd, and toward even
Sent for his shield: full meekly rose the maid,
Stript off the case, and gave the naked shield;
Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,
Unclasping flung the casement back, and look'd
Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone.
And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound;
And she by tact of love was well aware
That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.
And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,
Nor bade farewell, but sadly rode away.
This was the one discourtesy that he used.

So in her tower alone the maiden sat:
His very shield was gone; only the case,
Her own poor work, her empty labor, left.
But still she heard him, still his picture form'd
And grew between her and the pictured wall.
Then came her father, saying in low tones,
"Have comfort," whom she greeted quietly.
Then came her brethren saying, "Peace to thee,
Sweet sister," whom she answer'd with all calm.
But when they left her to herself again,
Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field
Approaching thro' the darkness, call'd; the owls
Wailing had power upon her, and she mixt
Her fancies with the sallow-rifted glooms
Of evening and the moanings of the wind.

And in those days she made a little song,
And call'd her song "The Song of Love and Death,"
And sang it: sweetly could she make and sing.

"Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain;
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain:
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

"Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be:
Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me.
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

"Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away;
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay:
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

"I fain would follow love, if that could be;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me;
Call and I follow, I follow! let me die."

High with the last line scaled her voice, and this,
All in a fiery dawning wild with wind
That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and thought
With shuddering, "Hark the Phantom of the house
That ever shrieks before a death," and call'd
The father, and all three in hurry and fear
Ran to her, and lo! the blood-red light of dawn
Flared on her face, she shrilling, "Let me die!"

As when we dwell upon a word we know,
Repeating, till the word we know so well
Becomes a wonder, and we know not why,
So dwelt the father on her face, and thought,
"Is this Elaine?" till back the maiden fell,
Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay,
Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.
At last she said: "Sweet brothers, yesternight
I seem'd a curious little maid again,

As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,
And when ye used to take me with the flood
Up the great river in the boatman's boat.
Only ye would not pass beyond the cape
That had the poplar on it: there ye fixt
Your limit, oft returning with the tide.
And yet I cried because ye would not pass
Beyond it, and far up the shining flood
Until we found the palace of the King.
And yet ye would not; but this night I dream'd
That I was all alone upon the flood,
And then I said, 'Now shall I have my will:'
And there I woke, but still the wish remain'd.
So let me hence that I may pass at last
Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,
Until I find the palace of the King.
There will I enter in among them all,
And no man there will dare to mock at me;
But there the fine Gawain will wonder at me,
And there the great Sir Lancelot muse at me;
Gawain, who bade a thousand farewells to me,
Lancelot, who coldly went, nor bade me one:
And there the King will know me and my love,
And there the Queen herself will pity me,
And all the gentle court will welcome me,
And after my long voyage I shall rest!"

"Peace," said her father, "O my child, ye seem
Light-headed, for what force is yours to go
So far, being sick? and wherefore would ye look
On this proud fellow again, who scorns us all?"

Then the rough Torre began to heave and move,
And bluster into stormy sobs and say:

"I never loved him: an I meet with him,
I care not howsoever great he be,
Then will I strike at him and strike him down;
Give me good fortune, I will strike him dead,
For this discomfort he hath done the house."

To whom the gentle sister made reply:
"Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth,
Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot's fault
Not to love me than it is mine to love
Him of all men who seems to me the highest."

"Highest?" the father answer'd, echoing "highest?"—
He meant to break the passion in her—"nay,
Daughter, I know not what you call the highest;
But this I know, for all the people know it,
He loves the Queen, and in an open shame:
And she returns his love in open shame;
If this be high, what is it to be low?"

Then spake the lily maid of Astolat:
"Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I
For anger: these are slanders; never yet
Was noble man but made ignoble talk.
He makes no friend who never made a foe.
But now it is my glory to have loved
One peerless, without stain: so let me pass,
My father, howsoe'er I seem to you,
Not all unhappy, having loved God's best
And greatest, tho' my love had no return:
Yet, seeing you desire your child to live,
Thanks, but you work against your own desire;
For if I could believe the things you say

I should but die the sooner; wherefore cease,
Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man
Hither, and let me shrive me clean and die."

So when the ghostly man had come and gone,
She, with a face bright as for sin forgiven,
Besought Lavaine to write as she devised
A letter, word for word; and when he ask'd,
"Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord?
Then will I bear it gladly;" she replied,
"For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world,
But I myself must bear it." Then he wrote
The letter she devised; which being writ
And folded, "O sweet father, tender and true,
Deny me not," she said — "ye never yet
Denied my fancies — this, however strange,
My latest: lay the letter in my hand
A little ere I die, and close the hand
Upon it; I shall guard it even in death.
And when the heat has gone from out my heart,
Then take the little bed on which I died
For Lancelot's love, and deck it like the Queen's
For richness, and me also like the Queen
In all I have of rich, and lay me on it.
And let there be prepared a chariot-bier
To take me to the river, and a barge
Be ready on the river, clothed in black.
I go in state to court, to meet the Queen.
There surely I shall speak for mine own self,
And none of you can speak for me so well.
And therefore let our dumb old man alone
Go with me; he can steer and row, and he
Will guide me to that palace, to the doors."

She ceased: her father promised; whereupon
She grew so cheerful that they deem'd her death
Was rather in the fantasy than the blood.
But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh
Her father laid the letter in her hand,
And closed the hand upon it, and she died.
So that day there was dole in Astolat.

But when the next sun brake from underground,
Then, those two brethren slowly with bent brows
Accompanying, the sad chariot-bier
Past like a shadow thro' the field, that shone
Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,
Pall'd all its length in blackest samite, lay.
There sat the lifelong creature of the house,
Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,
Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face.
So those two brethren from the chariot took
And on the black decks laid her in her bed,
Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung
The silken case with braided blazonings,
And kiss'd her quiet brows, and saying to her,
"Sister, farewell for ever," and again,
"Farewell, sweet sister," parted all in tears.
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead,
Oar'd by the dumb, went upward with the flood—
In her right hand the lily, in her left
The letter — all her bright hair streaming down —
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold
Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white
All but her face, and that clear-featured face
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,
But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled.

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved
Audience of Guinevere, to give at last
The price of half a realm, his costly gift,
Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,
With deaths of others, and almost his own,
The nine-years-fought-for diamonds; for he saw
One of her house, and sent him to the Queen
Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed
With such and so unmoved a majesty
She might have seem'd her statue, but that he,
Low-drooping till he wellnigh kiss'd her feet
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye
The shadow of some piece of pointed lace,
In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,
And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.

All in an oriel on the summer side,
Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream,
They met, and Lancelot kneeling utter'd, "Queen,
Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,
Take, what I had not won except for you,
These jewels, and make me happy, making them
An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,
Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's
Is tawnier than her cygnet's: these are words:
Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin
In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it
Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words
Perchance, we both can pardon: but, my Queen,
I hear of rumors flying thro' your court.
Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,
Should have in it an absoluter trust
To make up that defect: let rumors be:

When did not rumors fly? these, as I trust
That you trust me in your own nobleness,
I may not well believe that you believe."

While thus he spoke, half turn'd away, the Queen
Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine
Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,
Till all the place whereon she stood was green;
Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand
Received at once and laid aside the gems
There on a table near her, and replied:

"It may be I am quicker of belief
Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake.
Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.
This good is in it, whatsoe'er of ill,
It can be broken easier. I for you
This many a year have done despite and wrong
To one whom ever in my heart of hearts
I did acknowledge nobler. What are these?
Diamonds for me! they had been thrice their worth
Being your gift, had you not lost your own.
To loyal hearts the value of all gifts
Must vary as the giver's. Not for me!
For her! for your new fancy. Only this
Grant me, I pray you: have your joys apart.
I doubt not that, however changed, you keep
So much of what is graceful: and myself
Would shun to break those bonds of courtesy
In which as Arthur's Queen I move and rule:
So cannot speak my mind. An end to this!
A strange one! yet I take it with Amen.
So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls;

Deck her with these; tell her, she shines me down:
An armlet for an arm to which the Queen's
Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck
O as much fairer — as a faith once fair
Was richer than these diamonds — hers not mine —
Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,
Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will —
She shall not have them."

Saying which she seized,
And, thro' the casement standing wide for heat,
Flung them, and down they flash'd, and smote the stream.
Then from the smitten surface flash'd, as it were,
Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.
Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disdain
At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,
Close underneath his eyes, and right across
Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge
Whereon the lily maid of Astolat
Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night.

But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away
To weep and wail in secret; and the barge,
On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.
There two stood arm'd, and kept the door; to whom
All up the marble stair, tier over tier,
Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that ask'd,
"What is it?" but that oarsman's haggard face,
As hard and still as is the face that men
Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks
On some cliff-side, appall'd them, and they said,
"He is enchanted, cannot speak — and she,
Look how she sleeps — the Fairy Queen, so fair!

Yea, but how pale! what are they? flesh and blood?
Or come to take the King to Fairyland?
For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,
But that he passes into Fairyland."

While thus they babbled of the King, the King
Came girt with knights: then turn'd the tongueless man
From the half-face to the full eye, and rose
And pointed to the damsel, and the doors.
So Arthur bade the meek Sir Percivale
And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid;
And reverently they bore her into hall.
Then came the fine Gawain and wonder'd at her,
And Lancelot later came and mused at her,
And last the Queen herself, and pitied her:
But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,
Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all:

"Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat,
Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
Hither, to take my last farewell of you.
I loved you, and my love had no return,
And therefore my true love has been my death.
And therefore to our Lady Guinevere,
And to all other ladies, I make moan:
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.
Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,
As thou art a knight peerless."

Thus he read;
And ever in the reading, lords and dames
Wept, looking often from his face who read

To hers which lay so silent, and at times,
So touch'd were they, half-thinking that her lips,
Who had devised the letter, moved again.

Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all:
"My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,
Know that for this most gentle maiden's death
Right heavy am I; for good she was and true,
But loved me with a love beyond all love
In women, whomsoever I have known.
Yet to be loved makes not to love again;
Not at my years, however it hold in youth.
I swear by truth and knighthood that I gave
No cause, not willingly, for such a love:
To this I call my friends in testimony,
Her brethren, and her father, who himself
Besought me to be plain and blunt, and use,
To break her passion, some discourtesy
Against my nature: what I could, I did.
I left her and I bade her no farewell;
Tho' had I dreamt the damsel would have died,
I might have put my wits to some rough use,
And help'd her from herself."

Then said the Queen
(Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm)
"Ye might at least have done her so much grace,
Fair lord, as would have help'd her from her death."
He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell,
He adding,

"Queen, she would not be content
Save that I wedded her, which could not be.

Then might she follow me thro' the world, she ask'd;
It could not be. I told her that her love
Was but the flash of youth, would darken down,
To rise hereafter in a stiller flame
Toward one more worthy of her — then would I,
More specially were he, she wedded, poor,
Estate them with large land and territory
In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas,
To keep them in all joyance: more than this
I could not; this she would not, and she died."

He pausing, Arthur answer'd, "O my knight,
It will be to thy worship, as my knight,
And mine, as head of all our Table Round,
To see that she be buried worshipfully."

So toward that shrine which then in all the realm
Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went
The marshall'd Order of their Table Round,
And Lancelot sad beyond his wont, to see
The maiden buried, not as one unknown,
Nor meanly, but with gorgeous obsequies,
And mass, and rolling music, like a queen.
And when the knights had laid her comely head
Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings,
Then Arthur spake among them, "Let her tomb
Be costly, and her image thereupon,
And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet
Be carven, and her lily in her hand.
And let the story of her dolorous voyage
For all true hearts be blazon'd on her tomb
In letters gold and azure!" which was wrought
Thereafter; but when now the lords and dames

And people, from the high door streaming, broke
Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen,
Who mark'd Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,
Drew near, and sigh'd in passing, "Lancelot,
Forgive me; mine was jealousy in love."
He answer'd with his eyes upon the ground,
"That is love's curse; pass on, my Queen, forgiven."
But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows,
Approach'd him, and with full affection said:

"Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have
Most joy and most affiance, for I know
What thou hast been in battle by my side,
And many a time have watch'd thee at the tilt
Strike down the lusty and long practised knight,
And let the younger and unskill'd go by
To win his honor and to make his name,
And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man
Made to be loved; but now I would to God,
Seeing the homeless trouble in thine eyes,
Thou couldst have loved this maiden, shaped, it seems,
By God for thee alone, and from her face,
If one may judge the living by the dead,
Delicately pure and marvellously fair,
Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man
Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons
Born to the glory of thy name and fame,
My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake."

Then answer'd Lancelot: "Fair she was, my King,
Pure, as you ever wish your knights to be.
To doubt her fairness were to want an eye,
To doubt her pureness were to want a heart —

Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love
Could bind him, but free love will not be bound."

"Free love, so bound, were freest," said the King.
"Let love be free; free love is for the best:
And, after heaven, on our dull side of death,
What should be best, if not so pure a love
Clothed in so pure a loveliness? yet thee
She fail'd to bind, tho' being, as I think,
Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know."

And Lancelot answer'd nothing, but he went,
And at the inrunning of a little brook
Sat by the river in a cove, and watch'd
The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes
And saw the barge that brought her moving down,
Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said
Low in himself, "Ah, simple heart and sweet,
Ye loved me, damsel, surely with a love
Far tenderer than my Queen's. Pray for thy soul?
Ay, that will I. Farewell too — now at last —
Farewell, fair lily. 'Jealousy in love?'
Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride?
Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,
May not your crescent fear for name and fame
Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes?
Why did the King dwell on my name to me?
Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,
Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake
Caught from his mother's arms — the wondrous one
Who passes thro' the vision of the night —
She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns
Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn

She kiss'd me saying, 'Thou art fair, my child,
As a king's son,' and often in her arms
She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere.
Would she had drown'd me in it, where'er it be!
For what am I? what profits me my name
Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:
Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain:
Now grown a part of me: but what use in it?
To make men worse by making my sin known?
Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man
Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break
These bonds that so defame me: not without
She wills it: would I, if she will'd it? nay,
Who knows? but if I would not, then may God,
I pray him, send a sudden angel down
To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,
Among the tumbled fragments of the hills."

So groan'd Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,
Not knowing he should die a holy man.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

That story which the bold Sir Bedivere,
First made and latest left of all the knights,
Told, when the man was no more than a voice
In the white winter of his age, to those
With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,
Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,
Heard in his tent the moanings of the King:

"I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I mark'd Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not.
I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.
O me! for why is all around us here
As if some lesser god had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would,
Till the High God behold it from beyond,
And enter it, and make it beautiful?
Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
And have not power to see it as it is:
Perchance, because we see not to the close;—
For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
And have but stricken with the sword in vain;
And all whereon I lean'd in wife and friend
Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm

Reels back into the beast, and is no more.
My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death:
Nay — God my Christ — I pass but shall not die."

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,
There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain kill'd
In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown
Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
Went shrilling, "Hollow, hollow all delight!
Hail, King! to-morrow thou shalt pass away.
Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.
And I am blown along a wandering wind,
And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight!"
And fainter onward, like wild birds that change
Their season in the night and wail their way
From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream
Shrill'd; but in going mingled with dim cries
Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,
As of some lonely city sack'd by night,
When all is lost, and wife and child with wail
Pass to new lords; and Arthur woke and call'd,
"Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind,
Thine, Gawain, was the voice — are these dim cries
Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild
Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?"

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake:
"O me, my King, let pass whatever will,
Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field;
But in their stead thy name and glory cling
To all high places like a golden cloud
For ever: but as yet thou shalt not pass.
Light was Gawain in life, and light in death

Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man;
And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise —
I hear the steps of Modred in the west,
And with him many of thy people, and knights
Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown
Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.
Right well in heart they know thee for the King.
Arise, go forth and conquer as of old."

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"Far other is this battle in the west
Whereto we move than when we strove in youth,
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,
Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,
And shook him thro' the north. Ill doom is mine
To war against my people and my knights.
The king who fights his people fights himself.
And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke
That strikes them dead is as my death to me.
Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way
Thro' this blind haze which, ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes of the world."

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,
And ever push'd Sir Modred, league by league,
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonnesse —
A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again;
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,
And the long mountains ended in a coast
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.

There the pursuer could pursue no more,
And he that fled no further fly the King;
And there, that day when the great light of heaven
Burn'd at his lowest in the rolling year,
On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.
A death-white mist slept over sand and sea,
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
With formless fear; and even on Arthur fell
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.
For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew;
And some had visions out of golden youth,
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts
Look in upon the battle; and in the mist
Was many a noble deed, many a base,
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,
And ever and anon with host to host
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battle-axes on shatter'd helms, and shrieks
After the Christ, of those who falling down
Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist;
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
Sweat, writhings, anguish, laboring of the lungs
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one deathbed after wail
Of suffering, silence follows, or thro' death

Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore,
Save for some whisper of the seething seas,
A dead hush fell; but when the dolorous day
Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came
A bitter wind, clear from the north, and blew
The mist aside, and with that wind the tide
Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field
Of battle: but no man was moving there;
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,
Nor yet of heathen; only the wan wave
Brake in among dead faces, to and fro
Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,
And shiver'd brands that once had fought with Rome,
And rolling far along the gloomy shores
The voice of days of old and days to be.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,
And whiter than the mist that all day long
Had held the field of battle was the King:

"Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world,
And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move,
And beats upon the faces of the dead,
My dead, as tho' they had not died for me? —
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fallen
Confusion, till I know not what I am,
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King;
Behold, I seem but King among the dead."

Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere: "My King,
King everywhere! and so the dead have kings,
There also will I worship thee as King.

Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live
Who love thee; but who hates thee, he that brought
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,
Modred, unharm'd, the traitor of thine house."

Then spake the King: "My house hath been my doom.
But call not thou this traitor of my house
Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.
My house are rather they who sware my vows,
Yea, even while they brake them, own'd me King.
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,
When all the purport of my throne hath fail'd,
That quick or dead thou holdest me for King.
King am I, whatsoever be their cry;
And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see
Yet, ere I pass." And uttering this the King
Made at the man: then Modred smote his liege
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow,
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,
Slew him, and, all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,
Had fall'n in Lyonnesse about their lord,
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land:
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"The sequel of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep — the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made, —
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more; but, let what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword — and how I row'd across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king;
And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known:
But now delay not: take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere;
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word."

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:
"It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm —
A little thing may harm a wounded man;
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word."

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept,
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zigzag paths and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt;
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw: but at last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd
There in the many-knotted water-flags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave?
What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag."

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:
"Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd

Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight;
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word."

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud:

"And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done?
What harm, undone? Deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.
What record or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumors of a doubt? But were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying: 'King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps

Upon the hidden bases of the hills.'
So might some old man speak in the aftertime
To all the people, winning reverence.
But now much honor and much fame were lost."

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time
And so strode back slow to the wounded King.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily:
"What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds."

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:
"Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands."

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged

Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendor of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur;
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:
"Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Nor tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere."

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard:
"My end draws nigh; 't is time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,

And bear me to the margin; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die."

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words;
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, "Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die."
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels —
And on a sudden, lo, the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon!

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,

Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream — by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, "Place me in the barge."
So to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against a brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colorless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls —
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the dais-throne — were parch'd with dust,
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mixt with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:
"Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world,
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds."

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge:
"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seest — if indeed I go —

For all my mind is clouded with a doubt —
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

But when that moan had past for evermore,
The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn
Amazed him, and he groan'd, "The King is gone."
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,
"From the great deep to the great deep he goes."

Whereat he slowly turn'd and slowly clomb
The last hard footstep of that iron crag;
Thence mark'd the black hull moving yet, and cried,
"He passes to be King among the dead,
And after healing of his grievous wound
He comes again; but — if he come no more —
O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,
Who shriek'd and wail'd, the three whereat we gazed
On that high day, when, clothed with living light,
They stood before his throne in silence, friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need?"

Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
Ev'n to the highest he could climb, and saw,
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light.
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

NOTES

GARETH AND LYNETTE

1 1. **Lot**: king of Orkney.

1 1. **Bellicent**: queen of Orkney, daughter of Uther and Ygerne, half-sister of King Arthur.

1 2. **Gareth**: nephew to King Arthur. Malory causes Sir Kay to dub him Beaumains or Fairhands; and describes him as "large, and long, and broad in the shoulders, and well-visaged, and the fairest and largest hand that ever man saw."

1 2. **Spring**: in the allegory of "The Year" Gareth and Lynette represent the springtime.

1 3. **Spate**: a flood or freshet.

1 18. **Yield**: reward.

1 20. **Discaged**: uncaged. The figure begins with l. 14.

2 25. **Gawain**: son to Bellicent, half-brother to Gareth.

2 26. **Modred.** Some of the old legends make him the son of Arthur and his half sister, Bellicent. Arthur did not know that she was related to him; yet Nemesis follows him, for Modred finally gives the King his death blow. See *The Passing of Arthur*, l. 165.

2 27. **Proven**: tried or put to test.

2 32. **Sullen.** This word foreshadows. Modred finally proves a traitor to his King.

2 40. **An**: if.

2 40. **Goose and golden eggs.** For the story see Tennyson's poem, *The Goose.*

2 46. **Book of Hours**: a book which contained the prayers prescribed by the Church for the various hours of the day or week. The pages of the book were illuminated in colors with gilded initials and pictures.

2 47. **Haunting**: lingering.

2 51. **Leash of kings**: three or more. Originally leash meant the line with which the hunter held his three greyhounds; then by metonymy

it came to be used for the hounds themselves, and later for a pack of hounds.

3 56. **Clomb**: climbed.

3 56. **Brake**: broke.

3 66. **Excalibur**: King Arthur's sword,

> the sword
> That rose from out the bosom of the lake,
> And Arthur row'd across and took it — rich
> With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt,
> Bewildering heart and eye — the blade so bright
> That men are blinded by it — on one side,
> Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,
> "Take me," but turn the blade and ye shall see,
> And written in the speech ye speak yourself,
> "Cast me away!"
>
> *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 295–304.

3 76. **The barons' war.**

> For while he [King Arthur] linger'd there,
> [At the court of Guinevere's father]
> A doubt that ever smoulder'd in the hearts
> Of those great Lords and Barons of his realm
> Flash'd forth and into war: for most of these,
> Colleaguing with a score of petty kings,
> Made head against him, crying, "Who is he
> That he should rule us? who hath proven him
> King Uther's son? for lo! we look at him,
> And find nor face nor bearing, limbs nor voice,
> Are like to those of Uther whom we knew."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> So when the King had set his banner broad,
> At once from either side, with trumpet-blast,
> And shouts, and clarions shrilling unto blood,
> The long-lanced battle let their horses run.
> And now the Barons and the Kings prevail'd,
> And now the King, as here and there that war
> Went swaying; but the Powers who walk the world
> Made lightnings and great thunders over him,
> And dazed all eyes, till Arthur by main might,
> And mightier of his hands with every blow,
> And leading all his knighthood threw the kings
> Carádos, Urien, Cradlemont of Wales,

Claudius, and Clariance of Northumberland,
The King Brandagoras of Latangor,
With Anguisant of Erin, Morganore,
And Lot of Orkney.

The Coming of Arthur, ll. 62–71 and 100–117.

4 85. **Jousts**: military contests where two knights on horseback attacked each other with blunted lances. See Scott's account of a tournament in *Ivanhoe*.

4 88. **Tourney**: a contest of armed men with swords, lances, or other weapons.

4 90. **Burns**: streams.

4 105. **Good lack**: Good Lord.

4 116. **Follow the Christ**: in speaking of the oath he exacted from his knights, King Arthur is made to say:

I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
To reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honor his own word as if his God's,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her.

Guinevere, ll. 464–474.

5 128. **Cloud that settles round his birth**: Uther, Arthur's predecessor and reputed father, slew Gorloïs, a neighboring king, and took to wife his widow, Ygerne, the mother of Bellicent.

afterward,
Not many moons, King Uther died himself,
Moaning and wailing for an heir to rule
After him, lest the realm should go to wrack.
And that same night, the night of the new year,
By reason of the bitterness and grief
That vext his mother, all before his time
Was Arthur born, and all as soon as born
Deliver'd at a secret postern-gate
To Merlin, to be holden far apart
Until his hour should come.

"But let me tell thee now another tale," continued Bellicent, who had related to Leodogran the above story of Arthur's origin:

> on the night
> When Uther in Tintagil past away
> Moaning and wailing for an heir, the two
> Left the still King, and passing forth to breathe,
> Then from the castle gateway by the chasm
> Descending thro' the dismal night — a night
> In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost —
> Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps
> It seem'd in heaven, a ship, the shape thereof
> A dragon wing'd, and all from stem to stern
> Bright with a shining people on the decks,
> And gone as soon as seen. And then the two
> Dropt to the cove, and watch'd the great sea fall,
> Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,
> Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
> And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged
> Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame:
> And down the wave and in the flame was borne
> A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,
> Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried "The King!
> Here is an heir for Uther!"
>
> *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 204–214 and 364–385.

> For there be those who hate him in their hearts,
> Call him baseborn, and since his ways are sweet,
> And theirs are bestial, hold him less than man:
> And there be those who deem him more than man,
> And dream he dropt from heaven.
>
> *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 178–182.

5 131. **Yield**: allow.

5 133–134. **Who swept**, etc. Arthur was King of Britain in the sixth century. The Romans abandoned England early in the fifth. Thus Arthur "swept the dust of ruined Rome from off the threshold of the realm," and met and defeated the invading Saxons. He was the champion of Christianity against the surrounding heathen "idolaters."

6 151. **Knave**: boy or servant.

6 152. **Bar**: a rail or board, across which food was passed from the kitchen into the dining room.

6 157. **Villain** (adj.): slavish; **villain** (noun): a member of the lowest unfree class of serfs.

6 162. **Thrall:** slave.

6 172. **Perplext:** interfered with.

7 185. **Camelot.** "On the latest limit of the West, in the land of Lyonnesse, where save the rocky Isles of Scilly, all is now wild sea, rose the sacred Mount of Camelot. It rose from the deeps, with gardens and bowers, and palaces, and at the top of the mount was King Arthur's hall and the holy minster with the cross of gold." — A prose sketch found among Tennyson's papers, quoted by Dr. Vlymen.

7 187. **Royal mount.** "The Mount was the most beautiful in the world, sometimes green and fresh in the beam of morning, sometimes all one splendor, folded in the golden mists of the West. But all underneath was hollow and the mountain trembled, when the seas rushed bellowing through the porphyry caves; and there ran a prophecy that the mountain and the city on some wild morning would topple into the abyss and be no more." — Manuscript of Tennyson.

7 202. **Glamour:** enchantment.

7 202. **Merlin:**

> the most famous man of all those times,
> Merlin, who knew the range of all their arts,
> Had built the King his havens, ships, and halls,
> Was also Bard, and knew the starry heavens;
> The people call'd him Wizard.
>
> *Merlin and Vivien*, ll. 164–168.

> And there I saw mage Merlin, whose vast wit
> And hundred winters are but as the hands
> Of loyal vassals toiling for their liege.
>
> *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 279–281.

8 212. **Lady of the Lake.**

> Who knows a subtler magic than his [Merlin's] own —
> Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.
> She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword,
> Whereby to drive the heathen out: a mist
> Of incense curl'd about her, and her face
> Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom;
> But there was heard among the holy hymns
> A voice as of the waters, for she dwells
> Down in a deep; calm, whatsoever storms
> May shake the world, and when the surface rolls,
> Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord.
>
> *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 282–293.

8 219. **Sacred fish.** "The fish was adopted by the early Church as its sacred symbol, because the Greek word for fish [ΙΧΘΥΣ], which contains the initial letters of the name and titles of Christ [Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς, Θεοῦ Υἱὸς, Σωτήρ; Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour], contains also the initial letters of some prophetic lines ascribed to the Sibyl of Erythra." — Lecky, *European Morals*, I, 400.

8 225. **Three queens.** At the crowning of Arthur, there were

> three fair queens
> Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends
> Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright
> Sweet faces, who will help him at his need.
>
> *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 275–278.

Malory says, "One was King Arthur's sister, Queen Morgan le Fay, another was the Queen of Northgales; the third was the Queen of the Waste Lands."

8 229. **Boughts:** coils.

9 248. **Seer:** one who sees or foresees; a prophet.

9 249–251. The seer is describing a mirage, an optical illusion apparently elevating objects into the sky and inverting them.

9 256. **Sacred mountain:** Parnassus; in Greek mythology the home of Apollo and the Muses.

9 258. **And built it to the music of their harps.** So, legend says, Apollo built Troy.

> Like that strange song I heard Apollo sing,
> While Ilion like a mist rose into towers.
>
> *Tithonus*, ll. 62, 63.

10 271. **Enow:** enough.

10 280. **Riddling of the Bards.** The bards or poets of ancient Britain were supposed to have the gift of prophecy. Their prophetic utterances were often expressed in language that could bear a double interpretation. The predictions would thus be fulfilled whichever way the events ended. The following is an example of a "riddling triplet."

> Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow in the sky!
> A young man will be wiser by and by;
> An old man's wit may wander ere he die.
>
> Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow on the lea!
> And truth is this to me, and that to thee;
> And truth or clothed or naked let it be.

Rain, sun, and rain! and the free blossom blows:
Sun, rain, and sun! and where is he who knows?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes.

The Coming of Arthur, ll. 402–410.

10 287. **Brook:** endure.

10 293. **She, nor I:** give the syntax.

11 298. **Did their days in stone:** inscribed their deeds on stone.

11 314. **Delivering doom:** passing decrees or administering justice.

11 321. **Ranged:** stood in order.

12 333. **Whether:** which of two.

12 337. **Uther:** Arthur's predecessor and reputed father.

12 339. **Say:** report.

12 340. **Who:** give the syntax.

12 348. **Held with these:** sided with the barons.

12 351. **Standeth seized:** has seized and still holds possession of.

12 355. **Wreak:** avenge.

13 359. **Sir Kay:** King Arthur's foster brother.

13 359. **Seneschal:** steward.

13 362. **Gyve:** fetter.

13 362. **Gyve and gag:** send her to the ducking stool, the punishment for a woman who could not control her tongue.

13 366. **Had:** would have.

13 367. **Aurelius Emrys.** Ambrosius Aurelianus was emperor in Britain, Gaul, and Spain, under Honorius (about 440). The Arthurian legends make him brother of Uther, whom he preceded on the throne.

13 380. **Charlock:** wild mustard.

14 386. **Tristram.** Sir Tristram of Lyonnesse was nephew to King Mark, the word "cousin" being used in its older sense of kinsman. He was in love with Mark's wife, Iseult (i-sölt').

14 398. **Blazon'd:** given their heraldic colors.

14 411. **Reave:** deprive.

15 419. **Churl:** a peasant.

15 422. **Lap him up in cloth of lead:** roll him in his coffin, in those days made of lead.

15 423. **Craven:** a mean coward.

15 445. **Lichen:** a plant that often fastens itself to rock or stone or root. It will corrode the hardest rock or kill the thriftiest plant.

16 447. **Wot:** knows.

16 447. **Brewis:** broth or pottage.

16 451. **Lancelot**: the knight whom Arthur loved. In the barons' war,

> the two,
> For each had warded either in the fight,
> Sware on the field of death a deathless love.
>
> *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 129–131.

Lancelot and Arthur's Queen, Guinevere, fall in love, and he breaks his vows.

16 465. **Sir Fair-hands.** Beaumains is the name put in the mouth of Sir Kay by Malory. It means fair hands. See note, l 2.

17 476. **Broach**: spit, to which a piece of meat was fastened for roasting before an open fire.

17 489. **Tarns**: mountain lakes.

17 490. **Caer-Eryri**: Snowdon Field. Caer is a Welsh prefix meaning wall, fort, or castle; Eryri is the Welsh name of Snowdon, the highest mountain peak in Wales or in England.

17 492. **Isle Avilion** (ä-vil′ion, or, for the sake of the rhythm here, ä-vil′i-on″): literally, the "Isle of Apples." "In Celtic mythology, the Land of the Blessed, or Isle of Souls, an earthly paradise in the western seas." — *Century Cyclopedia of Names*. See *The Passing of Arthur*, ll. 427–432.

18 519. **Between the in-crescent and de-crescent moon**: at the time of the full moon.

18 524. **Ragged oval**: the boundary of their play lists.

18 528. **From Satan's foot to Peter's knee.** St. Peter kept the keys of the gate of Heaven. The meaning, then, is from Sir Kay's tyranny (Hell) to King Arthur's favor (Heaven).

18 529. **News**: now used as a singular noun though plural in form.

20 571. **Lions**: the heraldic device on Lancelot's shield.

> And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw
> Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold,
> Ramp in the field.
>
> *Lancelot and Elaine*, ll. 658–660.

20 573. **Hall.** The mighty hall of Arthur is described in *The Holy Grail*, 225 ff.

20 575. **May-blossom**: the white hawthorn which blossoms in May.

> The lanes, you know, were white with may.
>
> *The Miller's Daughter*.

20 586. **Best blood**: the wine used at the sacrament, typical of Christ's blood.

21 607. **Or a holy life**: or become a nun.

22 642. **May**: hawthorn blossom or color of the hawthorn blossom.

22 646. **Lane of access**: passage to the King between the rows of knights.

23 665. **Maiden shield**: the shield of an unproved knight.

23 665. **Casque**: helmet.

23 678. **Trenchant**: sharpened.

24 688. **Being named**: called by name.

24 693. **Hath past his time**: has reached his dotage.

25 729. **Foul-flesh'd agaric in the holt**: decayed or ill-smelling fungus in the wood. The mushroom belongs to the agaricoid fungi.

25 729. **Holt**: a grove.

25 742. **Shingle**: water-worn stones, coarser than gravel.

26 749. **Unhappiness**: mischance.

26 751. **Loon**: stupid fellow.

26 766. **Beknaved**: called knave.

27 773. **Evensong**: vespers.

27 778. **Mere**: a stagnant pool.

27 799. **Caitiff**: wicked.

27 804. **Wan**: gloomy.

28 828. **Cate**: a dainty article of food.

28 829. **Peacock.** When the peacock was served at table, in the days of knight-errantry, "All the guests, male and female, took a solemn vow; the knights vowing bravery, and the ladies engaging to be loving and faithful." [Quoted by Rolfe.] Lynette is thus reminded of her duty as a lady.

29 839. **Frontless**: shameless.

29 862. **Avail**: advantage.

30 870. **Allow**: accept.

30 871. **Stoat**: ermine. The lion and the ermine have been companions on the same small island.

30 873. **Ruth**: pity.

30 881. **Hers**: Cinderella's.

30 889. **Lent-lily in hue**: yellow, the color of the daffodil or Lent lily, which is so called because it blossoms about the lenten season.

31 908. **Avanturine**: a variety of feldspar, spangled with scales of mica.

31 922. **Liefer had I**: I had rather.

32 934. **Lightly**: quickly.

32 948. **Grovelling**: flat on the ground, face downward.

33 971. **Morning star.** Lynette is changing. Love for Gareth is entering her heart, though she is too proud to withdraw the epithets with which she has "beknaved" him.

33 979. **Fool's parable**: foolish parable of the day, — the "Morning-Star, and Noon-Sun, and Evening-Star."

34 996. **Worship**: respect.

34 1002. **Shallow**: stream.

34 1002. **Flower**: the dandelion.

34 1008. **Brother.** Gareth, having the shield of Morning-Star, is mistaken by Noon-Sun for his brother.

34 1008. **Marches**: the borderlands or boundaries of his district.

35 1012. **Vizoring**: covering with the vizor of his helmet.

35 1013. **Cipher**: round and meaningless.

35 1026. **Myself when I return will plead for thee.** Gareth is a true knight. His antagonist fell because of an accident to his horse. Knightly courtesy demanded that he be dealt with as an unfortunate. Gareth not only rescued him from the stream but promised to plead for him at Arthur's court.

36 1048. **The boar hath rosemaries and bay.** The boar's head, when served before the king, is garnished not with flowers but with rosemaries (evergreens) and bay (laurel).

36 1052. **Mavis**: song thrush.

36 1052. **Merle**: European blackbird.

36 1060. **Treble bow**: three spans.

36 1067. **Wrapt in harden'd skins.** In the allegory these hardened skins may be taken to mean the evil habits of a lifetime.

37 1075. **Disaster.** Etymologically this word means ill star or evil star.

38 1099. **Foredooming**: foreboding or apprehending or fearing.

38 1118. **Buoy**: the object of "can bring under," the understood predicate of "Southwesterns."

39 1130. **Trefoil**: clover.

39 1146. **Sooth**: truth.

40 1163. **Comb**: a "bowl-shaped hollow or valley inclosed on all sides but one by steep and in some cases perpendicular cliffs." — *Century Dictionary.*

40 1172. **Vexillary**: a Roman standard bearer. The reference is to certain Latin inscriptions made by a Roman standard bearer on the cliffs above the river Gelt in Cumberland.

40 1174. **Phosphorus**: the Greek for morning star.

40 1174. **Meridies**: the Latin for midday.

40 1174. **Hesperus**: the Greek for evening star.

40 1175. **Nox**: the Latin for night.

40 1175. **Mors**: the Latin for death.

43 1273. **Ramp**: rear or spring up.

44 1281. **Arthur's Harp.** Gareth was studying the stars. Some believe that the constellation called Arthur's Harp was the one known as Lyra, consisting of three stars, Vega, Arcturus, and Polaris, arranged in the shape of a triangle. Dr. Rolfe, quoting the lines from *The Last Tournament*,

> Dost thou know the star
> We call the harp of Arthur up in heaven?

infers that the Harp was a single star and not a constellation. The star Arcturus, constellation Boötes, is known as Arthur's Hufe (haunt). Dr. Vlymen says that the Great Bear is here referred to.

46 1348. **Fleshless laughter**: the grinning skull of Death.

47 1367. **Blink**: shut their eyes to.

47 1386. **Then sprang the happier day from underground.** In the allegory, spring has come, and the plant life rises again from its season of "death."

47 1392. **He**: Malory, the author of *Morte Darthur*.

47 1394. **He**: Tennyson.

LANCELOT AND ELAINE

49 2. **Astolat**: the Arthurian name for Guilford in Surrey.

49 4. **Sacred**: to Elaine.

49 8. **Braided**: embroidered.

49 10. **Tinct**: tint.

49 10. **Wit**: skill or fancy.

49 22. **Caerlyle**: Carlisle in Cumberland.

49 23. **Caerleon**: in Monmouthshire, where King Arthur, according to tradition, held his court.

49 23. **Camelot**: described in *Gareth and Lynette*, ll. 296 ff.

50 35. **Lyonnesse**: the mythical land from which Arthur came and the birthplace of Sir Tristram.

> A land of old upheaven from the abyss
> By fire, to sink into the abyss again.
>
> *The Passing of Arthur*, ll. 82–83.

Now, "it is said to be more than forty fathoms under water between the Land's End and the isles of Scilly, the sea having gradually encroached upon the land." — *Century Cyclopedia of Names.*

50 36. **Tarn**: a small lake which has no visible feeders or outlets.

50 50. **Nape**: the back, upper part of the neck.

50 53. **Shingly scaur** (skär): a steep cliff covered with loose water-worn stones.

51 59. **Divinely**: by the guidance of God, or providentially.

51 67. **Still**: every year.

51 69. **Queen**: Guinevere, between whom and Lancelot there existed unknightly relations.

51 75. **Place**: London.

52 91. **Tale**: number.

52 94. **Lets**: hinders or keeps.

52 110. **Allow'd**: permitted.

52 111. **Of**: by.

52 118. **Devoir**: duty.

53 125. **Untruth**: unfaithfulness.

53 132. **He is all fault who hath no fault at all.** Is this the common verdict? Nearly the same idea is expressed in the following lines from Tennyson's *Maud*, I. ii. ll. 6–7:

> Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,
> Dead perfection, no more.

57 269. **Glanced at**: spoke of.

57 270. **Suddenly speaking of the wordless man.** Not caring to talk of the Queen and himself, Lancelot changes the subject by asking a question about the dumb porter who met him at the gates of Astolat.

58 279. **Badon hill**: Mons Badonicus, or Badbury Rings in Dorsetshire. When, in 520, the Saxons (called in *The Idylls* the "White Horse") were invading England, "the Britons rallied under a new leader, Arthur, and threw back the invaders as they pressed westward

through the Dorsetshire wood-lands in a great overthrow at Badbury or Mount Badon." — Green, *History of the English People*, I, 24.

58 280. **Rapt**: transported.

58 288 ff. "The first battle in which he [Arthur] was engaged, was at the mouth of the river Gleni. The second, third, fourth, and fifth, were on the river, by the Britons called Duglas, in the region Linius. The sixth, on the river Bassas. The seventh, in the wood Celidon, which the Britons call Cat Coit Celidon. The eighth was near Gurnion castle, where Arthur bore the image of the Holy Virgin, mother of God, upon his shoulders, and through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the holy Mary, put the Saxons to flight, and pursued them the whole day with great slaughter. The ninth was at the City of Legion [Exeter], which is called Cair Lion. The tenth was on the banks of the river Trat Treuroit. The eleventh was on the mountain Breguoin, which we call Cat Bregion. The twelfth was a most severe contest, when Arthur penetrated to the hill of Badon. In this engagement, nine hundred and forty fell by his hand alone, no one but the Lord affording him assistance. In all these engagements the Britons were successful. For no strength can avail against the will of the Almighty."

Gleni = Glem, in Lincolnshire, by some.
= probably Glen, in Northumberland.
Duglas = the little river Dunglas.
Bassas = an isolated rock called "The Bass" in the Frith of Forth, not a river.
Celidon = the Caledonian forest, or the forest of Englewood.
Gurnion castle = probably "the Roman station of Garionenni, near Yarmouth, in Norfolk."
Legion = Exeter.
Trat Treuroit = the Brue, in Somersetshire; or the Ribble, Lancashire.
Cat Bregion = Cadbury, in Somersetshire; or Edinburgh.
Badon = Bath.
— Nennius, *History of the Britons*, translated by J. A. Giles, "Six Old English Chronicles," Bohn's Antiquarian Library, 408, 409, and Note.

58 297. **Wild White Horse.** The White Horse was the emblem of the Saxon invaders.

> Tamper'd with the Lords of the White Horse,
> Heathen, the brood by Hengist left.
>
> *Guinevere*, ll. 15–16.

59 314. **The fire of God.** King Arthur was God's champion.

> "Sir and my liege," he [Lancelot] cried, "the fire of God
> Descends upon thee in the battle-field."
>
> *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 127–128.

59 338. **Rathe**: early.

60 357. **Braved**: set at defiance.

62 422. **Pendragon**: At the moment when King Aurelius died, there appeared to Uther "a star of wonderful magnitude and brightness, darting forth a ray, at the end of which was a globe of fire in form of a dragon, out of whose mouth issued two rays; one of which seemed to stretch out itself beyond the extent of Gaul, the other towards the Irish Sea, and ended in seven lesser rays." Uther, the King's brother, in alarm consulted Merlin as to the meaning of the portent. He answered "You shall be king of Britain. For the star, and the fiery dragon under it, signifies yourself, and the ray extending towards the Gallic coast, portends that you shall have a most potent son, to whose power all those kingdoms shall be subject over which the ray reaches." When Uther became king, "remembering the explanation which Merlin had made of the star above-mentioned, [he] commanded two dragons to be made of gold, in likeness of the dragon which he had seen at the ray of the star. . . . From this time, therefore, he was called Uther Pendragon, which in the British tongue signifies the dragon's head." —Geoffrey of Monmouth, *British History*, translated by J. A. Giles, "Six Old English Chronicles," Bohn's Antiquarian Library, 219–221.

62 423. **Mysteriously**: referring to the mystery of King Arthur's birth.

62 431. **Samite**: a heavy silk material.

63 446. **Crescent**: in the first quarter; that is, in the period of promise.

66 548. **Restless heart.** The changing lights reflected from the diamond gave it the restless appearance.

66 552. **In the mid might and flourish of his May**: at the height of his power.

66 554. **Geraint.**

> The brave Geraint, a knight of Arthur's court,
> A tributary prince of Devon, one
> Of that great Order of the Table Round.
>
> *The Marriage of Geraint*, ll. 1–3.

67 567. **Tarriance**: delay or lingering.

68 592. **So fine a fear**: note the sarcasm.

69 653. **Hern:** heron.

69 653. **Slipt:** loosened. In the practice of falconry the hunter "loosened" the falcon that he might pursue and catch the heron.

71 715. **Strokes of blood:** pulse beats.

72 717. **Shook his hair.** Sir Gawain, the courteous nephew of the King, was given similar characteristics in *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 319–321.

> And Gawain went, and breaking into song
> Sprang out, and follow'd by his flying hair
> Ran like a colt.

74 798. **His own far blood:** his relatives, distantly removed.

76 871. **Honor,** etc. Note the antithesis.

77 883. **Rough sickness:** delirium. See ll. 849, 850.

77 905. **Victim's flowers before he fall.** She is comparing herself to the animal intended for sacrifice. The ancients decorated such animals with garlands.

79 953. **Half my realm beyond the seas.** "But to say the sooth, Sir Lancelot and his nephews were lords of all France, and of all the lands that longed unto France." — Malory, *Morte Darthur*, XX, 18.

81 1015. **Hark the Phantom of the house:** the "banshee" of the house of Astolat. In Ireland and in some parts of Scotland "the *banshee* is a species of aristocratic fairy, who, in the shape of a little hideous old woman, has been known to appear, and heard to sing in a mournful supernatural voice under the windows of great houses, to warn the family that some were soon to die." — *Century Dictionary*.

84 1092. **Ghostly man:** priest.

86 1170. **Oriel:** a room that projects out from the wall of a house. It was formerly used as a boudoir.

86 1170. **Summer side:** southern side.

86 1178. **Tawnier than her cygnet's.** The down of the young swan is dark or tan colored. Lancelot says that the swan's neck, compared with the Queen's, seems darker than her cygnet's.

89 1265. **Sometime:** formerly.

91 1311. **Estate:** as a transitive verb this word is rare in modern usage. — *Murray's Dictionary*.

91 1316. **Worship:** honor.

91 1318. **Worshipfully:** honorably.

91 1319. **That shrine which then in all the realm was richest:** Westminster Abbey.

92 1346. **Affiance**: trust.

92 1354. **Homeless**: loneliness caused by the lack of home ties.

94 1399. **King's son.** Lancelot was the son of Ban, king of Brittany.

94 1418. **He should die a holy man.** When Arthur discovered the guilt of Lancelot and the Queen, he decreed that Guinevere should be burned at the stake. Lancelot rescued her and took her to his castle, "Joyous Gard." There he was besieged by Arthur and Gawain. The Pope, interfering, brought about a peace and the return of Guinevere to Arthur's court. Lancelot returned to his estate beyond the seas. Arthur followed and made war against him, besieging him in his home castle. The King was called home by the rebellion of Modred, who desired to overthrow Arthur and become king. After Arthur's death, according to Malory, Guinevere retired to the nunnery at Almesbury (Amesbury). Lancelot sought her and found her there, but she, refusing to go with him, made him promise never again to see her face. Having promised, he departed and "rode all that day and all that night in a forest, weeping." At last he came to a hermitage and a chapel, where dwelt the Bishop of Canterbury and the knight, Sir Bedivere. Lancelot's request to be received as a brother of the order was granted; so he put on the habit and served God with prayers and fastings. Later he learned of the Queen's death. After that, refusing food, he soon died. His body was, by his request, taken to castle Joyous Gard and laid to rest in the body of the quire. — *Morte Darthur*, XX and XXI.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

95 1 **Sir Bedivere:**

> the first of all his knights
> Knighted by Arthur at his crowning.

96 28. **I pass but shall not die.** Merlin had prophesied that Arthur should not die.

> Merlin in our time
> Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn
> Tho' man may wound him [the King] that he will not die,
> But pass, again to come; and then or now
> Utterly smite the heathen underfoot,
> Till these and all men hail him for their king.
>
> *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 418–423.

96 30–31. **Gawain kill'd in Lancelot's war.** According to Malory, while Arthur was making war against Lancelot, Gawain received a wound at Lancelot's hand which healed. Then came news that Modred, having raised a rebellion, had proclaimed himself king. Thereupon Arthur and Gawain returned to England, met Modred at Dover, and overcame him in battle. After the battle, Gawain was found unconscious in a boat. He had been injured in the old wound made by Lancelot. When Arthur found him, he regained consciousness long enough to write a letter to Lancelot urging him to come to Arthur's aid. "And so at the hour of noon, Sir Gawain yielded up the spirit. And then the king let inter him in a chapel within Dover castle; and there yet all men may see the skull of him, and the same wound is seen that Sir Lancelot gave him in battle." — Malory, *Morte Darthur*, XXI, 2.

96 35. **Isle of rest**: "the island-valley of Avilion," l. 427.

97 77. **Almesbury.** The Queen (according to Tennyson) fled to the nunnery at Almesbury. Hither the King followed her. When she heard his step ring along the gallery leading to her cell, she fell from off her seat

> And grovell'd with her face against the floor.

The King forgave her and blest her. After he went away the nuns

> took her to themselves; and she
> Still hoping, fearing, "is it yet too late?"
> Dwelt with them, till in time their Abbess died.
> Then she, for her good deeds and her pure life,
> And for the power of ministration in her,
> And likewise for the high rank she had borne,
> Was chosen Abbess, there, an Abbess, lived
> For three brief years, and there, an Abbess, past
> To where beyond these voices there is peace.
>
> *Guinevere*, ll. 684–692.

99 135. **The voice**, etc. "The ocean has frequently been used in literature as a symbol of Time and Eternity." — Rowe.

99 139–142. **Voice that shakes the world, and wastes the narrow realm . . . and beats**, etc.: the sound of the ocean beating on the shore and wearing it away.

100 160. **Purport**: purpose.

100 177. **Chancel**: "the eastern and most sacred portion of a church." — Rowe.

100 180. **Water**: lake.

101 182. **Unsolders**: dissolves.

101 211. **Hest**: command.

102 215. **Mighty bones**: "The bones of the Danish invaders heaped up in part of the church building at Hythe are abnormally large-sized, and seem to show that 'there were giants in those days.'" — Rowe.

103 243. **Fealty**: fidelity to a lord.

103 248. **Lief**: beloved.

103 272. **Maiden of the Lake.** Queen Bellicent was at the crowning of Arthur, and thus describes the Lady of the Lake:

> And near him stood the Lady of the Lake,
> Who knows a subtler magic than his own —
> Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.
> She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword,
> Whereby to drive the heathen out: a mist
> Of incense curl'd about her, and her face
> Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom;
> But there was heard among the holy hymns
> A voice as of the waters, for she dwells
> Down in a deep; calm, whatsoever storms
> May shake the world, and when the surface rolls,
> Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord.
>
> *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 282–294.

105 307. **Northern morn**: the Aurora Borealis.

105 308. **Moving isles of winter**: blocks of ice floating in the northern sea; icebergs.

107 366. **Three Queens.** "One was King Arthur's sister, Queen Morgan le Fay; the other was the Queen of Northgales; the third was the Queen of the Waste Lands." — Malory, *Morte Darthur*, XXI, 6. They were the same as, at his crowning, the

> three fair queens,
> Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends
> Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright
> Sweet faces, who will help him at his need.
>
> *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 275–278.

107 383. **Greaves**: the part of the armor that protected the front of the leg between the knee and the foot.

107 383. **Cuisses**: armor for the thighs.

108 401. **Holy Elders**: the three wise men, who, guided by the star, came to the child Christ, bringing gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. See Matthew ii. 11.

108 403. **Image of the mighty world.** "Merlin made the Round Table in tokening of the roundness of the world, for by the Round Table is the world signified by right." — Malory, *Morte Darthur*, XIV, 2.

108 408. This line is quoted from *The Coming of Arthur*, l. 508.

109 435. **Fluting a wild carol ere her death.** "The musical note of swans hath been commended, and that they sing most sweetly before their death." — Sir Thomas Browne, *Works*, II, 517, London, 1836. This belief, that formerly was quite common, has long since been exploded.

109 445. **From the great deep to the great deep he goes.** This is a verse from one of Merlin's "riddling triplets" (*The Coming of Arthur*, l. 410).

100

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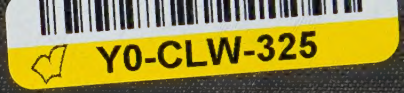
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